E:\Digital crime,
Technology and
Social Harms\>_

The Incel Rebellion

The Rise of the Manosphere and the Virtual War Against Women

Lisa Sugiura

OPEN ACCESS BOOK

The Incel Rebellion

EMERALD STUDIES IN DIGITAL CRIME, TECHNOLOGY AND SOCIAL HARMS

Series Editors: James Martin, Swinburne University of Technology, Australia
Asher Flynn, School of Social Sciences, Monash University, Australia

Over the past two decades, digital technologies have come to permeate ever more aspects of contemporary life. This trend looks to continue and has profound implications for the social sciences, particularly criminology, with technology-facilitated offences now arguably constituting the most dynamic and rapidly growing area of contemporary crime. Despite this development, the discipline of criminology has been slow to embrace the critical study of technology-facilitated offences and social harms, with most research conducted in this area still informed by a relatively narrow range of cybersecurity and applied criminological perspectives.

Emerald Studies in Digital Crime, Technology and Social Harms is part of a new movement within criminology and related disciplines to broaden this narrow focus and engage critically with new trends in technology-facilitated offending and victimisation. The book series uses a combination of critical criminological, socio-legal and sociological perspectives to consider a wide range of technology-facilitated offences and harmful social practices, ranging from digital surveillance, cyberbullying and image-based sexual abuse through to global darknet drug trading.

Previous books in the series:

Cryptomarkets: A Research Companion; James Martin, Jack Cunliffe, and Rasmus Munksgaard

The Emerald International Handbook of Technology-facilitated Violence and Abuse; Jane Bailey, Asher Flynn, and Nicola Henry

Information Pollution as Social Harm: Investigating the Digital Drift of Medical Misinformation in a Time of Crisis; Anita Lavorgna

The Incel Rebellion: The Rise of the Manosphere and the Virtual War Against Women

BY

LISA SUGIURA
University of Portsmouth, UK

United Kingdom – North America – Japan – India – Malaysia – China

Emerald Publishing Limited
Howard House, Wagon Lane, Bingley BD16 1WA, UK

First edition 2021

Copyright © Lisa Sugiura 2021 Published by Emerald Publishing Limited. This work is published under the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY 4.0) licence. Anyone may reproduce, distribute, translate and create derivative works of this work (for both commercial and non-commercial purposes), subject to full attribution to the original publication and authors. The full terms of this licence may be seen at http://creativecommons.org/licences/by/4.0/legalcode

An electronic version of this book is freely available, thanks to the support of libraries working with Knowledge Unlatched. KU is a collaborative initiative designed to make high quality books Open Access for the public good. More information about the initiative and links to the Open Access version can be found at www.knowledgeunlatched.org

Reprints and permissions service
Contact: permissions@emeraldinsight.com
No part of this book may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, transmitted in any form or by any means electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise without either the prior written permission of the publisher or a licence permitting restricted copying issued in the UK by The Copyright Licensing Agency and in the USA by The Copyright Clearance Center. Any opinions expressed in the chapters are those of the authors. Whilst Emerald makes every effort to ensure the quality and accuracy of its content, Emerald makes no representation implied or otherwise, as to the chapters' suitability and application and disclaims any warranties, express or implied, to their use.

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN: 978-1-83982-257-5 (Print)
ISBN: 978-1-83982-254-4 (Online)
ISBN: 978-1-83982-256-8 (Epub)

ISOQAR certified Management System, awarded to Emerald for adherence to Environmental standard ISO 14001:2004.

Certificate Number 1985
ISO 14001

INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

This book is dedicated to all those whose lives have
been affected by gender-based violence.

Praise for The Incel Rebellion: The Rise of the Manosphere and the Virtual War Against Women (KU)

"Drawing on extensive empirical research and a masterful use of socio-criminological understanding, Dr Sugiura's new book offers an incisive and timely analysis of the realities and the threats of the incel community. I hope this book will soon become a key reference point for anyone with an interest in the relationship between misogynistic ideologies and the wider socio-political climate, online harms, and qualitative digital research approaches."

Dr Anita Lavorgna, Associate Professor in Criminology, University of Southampton

"In *Incel Rebellion* Lisa Sugiura provides a rare empirical insight into the subcultures and practices of incel communities in the manosphere. The result is a compelling and innovative account of how some men find their way into incel communities, as well as the links between such spaces and wider misogyny in our increasingly digital society. This book is an outstanding contribution to the field of digital criminology and will be an essential resource for those studying cybercrime and other online harms."

Anastasia Powell, Associate Professor Criminology & Justice Studies, RMIT University (Melbourne).

"*The Incel Rebellion: The Rise of the Manosphere and the Virtual War Against Women* is an extremely timely and brilliant exploration of a pressing and immediate area of concern; one that has direct implications for safety, security, policy, and the general moral health of society. Cutting across various disciplines, including gender studies, criminology, and terrorism studies, Dr Sugiura masterfully navigates a number of important and complex considerations, including why people self-identify as incels, and what motivates them to join these types of communities. The jewel in the crown is the author's collection and use of qualitative interviews with current and former incels. As far as I'm aware, this is the first empirical academic study of its kind, and the rich data brings this fascinating area of research alive. This book is an absolute must for anyone interested in this topic and should form part of the foundation for any future work."

Dr Suraj Lakhani Lecturer in Criminology and Sociology Sussex University

"Sugiura's *Incel Rebellion* is a must read for anyone wanting to understand the history and ideology around the Incel community. In a time where male supremacy is becoming an increasing security concern, Sugiura expertly details the links existing between the so-called 'manosphere', white supremacy, and the mainstream political arena. In addition to providing a stellar account of the history of male supremacism, Sugiura reflects on the methodological and ethical issues that come from being a woman studying misogyny, an account that will no doubt be extremely valuable for future researchers wishing to conduct similar studies. Most importantly, this book provides clear evidence that extreme misogyny is not just a problem for the fringe, but rather has crept into the mainstream infecting the normative culture of our western societies."

Ashton Kingdon - Doctoral Fellow at the Centre for Analysis of the Radical Right

Contents

Abbreviations *ix*

Glossary of Terms *xi*

Author Biography *xiii*

Acknowledgements *xv*

The Incel Vocabulary *xvii*

Epigraphs *xxii*

Chapter 1 An Introduction to Incel *1*

Chapter 2 The Emergence and Development of the Manosphere *15*

Chapter 3 Join the Incel Rebellion *37*

Chapter 4 Weirdos or Extremists? *69*

Chapter 5 Legitimising Misogyny *97*

Chapter 6 Conclusion *117*

References *129*

Index *141*

This page intentionally left blank

Abbreviations

Incel – Involuntary Celibate
MGTOW – Men Going Their Own Way
MLM – Men's Liberation Movement
MRA – Men's Rights Activist
MRM – Men's Rights Movement
PUA – Pick Up Artists
SMP – Sexual Market Place
SMV – Sexual Market Value
WLM – Women's Liberation Movement
XRW – Extreme Right Wing

This page intentionally left blank

Glossary of Terms

Men's Rights Activists (MRAs) are driven by anger and want to effect change, namely a return to the traditional values where women are subordinate to men. Women need to be put back in their place and to do so abuse of women, particularly feminists, is encouraged.

Men Going Their Own Way (MGTOW)
Despite what its name may imply, MGTOW members weaponise homophobia in order to solidify their heterosexuality in a space that rejects women, and they use online harassment to police the borders of hegemonic and toxic masculinity. The MGTOW movement differs slightly from much of the manosphere as it rejects any form of relationship with women, but the same issues of violence and harassment are present.

Pick Up Artists (PUAs) view women as mere objects, bodies to be tricked into sex. There is no consideration of women as autonomous human beings worthy of honesty or respect; moreover, they are simply shallow and motivated by looks and money, and thus fair game to be deceived and used for sexual purposes because that is all they are good for. Pick up artistry is informed by a hegemonic ideal of what it is to be masculine evident in the lad culture and banter so pervasive in contemporary society – link with ladette culture in the 1990s/2000s.

https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2019/nov/05/pickup-artists-teaching-men-approach-women-industry-street-harassment

Fathers for Justice (FFJ)
Unlike the aforementioned groups residing in the manosphere, the primary focus for FFJ is actual men's problems rather than espousing vitriol against women, progressiveness and feminism. FFJ is concerned with paternal rights and ensuring that fathers have access to their children when relationships break down, when Criminal Justice Systems entrenched in sexist, conservative ideals ordinarily operate in favour of the mother. In this respect, the continuation of traditional gender roles, the desire and ideal of other groups in the manosphere, marginalises men and devalues their status as parents.

This page intentionally left blank

Author Biography

Lisa Sugiura is Senior Lecturer in Criminology and Cybercrime at the Institute of Criminal Justice Studies at the University of Portsmouth. Her research examines the intersections of gender-based abuse, harassment, sexual violence and technology, and she is the author of *Respectable Deviance and Purchasing Medicine Online: Opportunities and Risks for Consumers* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2018). She has worked on projects, which includes funding from the UK National Cyber Security Centre and the UK Home Office, investigating the language of cybersexism, victims of computer misuse and extremist and misogynistic behaviours in incel communities. She has been the Lead Investigator on a UK Home Office-funded project on technology-facilitated domestic abuse. She is the Deputy Director of the Cybercrime Awareness Clinic, which won the UK National Cybercrime Awareness award in 2020.

This page intentionally left blank

Acknowledgements

I am grateful to many people for their support and encouragement throughout the writing of this book and the research upon which it is based. First, thank you to the editorial team at Emerald, in particular Jules Willan, Katy Mathers, Ramya Murali, Rajachitra Suresh, as well as the *Digital Crime, Technology and Social Harms* Series Editors Asher Flynn and James Martin, who have all been constant sources of enthusiasm for this book, from its initial conception through to proposal and publication. Thank you for seeing the value and significance of this topic and entrusting me to deliver this book.

Thanks to my many feminist friends, colleagues and mentors in Criminology, Cybercrime and elsewhere, in particular to Alessia – working on the cybersexism project with you provided me with the initial inspiration to continue researching this field; Anita – the most efficient writing partner, whom collaborating with is always a joy, and who provided me with productive opportunities to reflect upon the research as well as an empathetic ear; Anastasia – my inspirational mentor and friend who has encouraged me, helped me grow as an academic and who first suggested that I should write this book; and Sarah – who I credit in helping me to have the courage to believe in myself. Thanks also to April, Ashton, Anna, Harri and Kath for your friendship, wisdom and for helping to keep me sane. I am also deeply grateful to my male mentors, colleagues and friends – Mark, Pete, Paul, Vas, Jason, Suraj and Adam – who have supported and encouraged me and inspired me to not set boundaries upon myself. I express my heartfelt thanks foremost to my family – to Dad, Mum, Denise, Kevin, Bill and Dot, thank you for standing by me and believing in me. Josh and Dylan, you are the reason I do what I do, and I hope that in some way I am contributing to making the world a better place for you. Matt, I will forever be grateful for you, thank you for being the most supportive, thoughtful and grounded person I know.

Finally, thank you to my participants who spoke honestly and openly with me and treated me respectfully. Thank you for enabling me to appreciate the humanity within the incel community.

This page intentionally left blank

The Incel Vocabulary

I have tried to include as comprehensive a guide to incel words and neologisms as possible, drawn from my research and the incel wiki page, but there is probably terminology that I have not encountered and so has not been included here. Nevertheless, hopefully, the following is useful in providing insight into the self-created world of the incel, reflecting their worldview.

Alpha – highest ranking (male)

AM – Alex Minassian who killed multiple people in Toronto 2018

Ascension – leaving inceldom behind (usually by entering into a romantic relationship with a woman, unclear how this is distinct from betabuxx or being cucked)

Aspie – someone on the autistic spectrum

AWALT – All Women Are Like That (see also EWALT – Enough Women Are Like That)

Becky – an average young woman, subordinate to Stacy in terms of looks and social status

Beta – below alpha – lacking in social skills and attractiveness to be an alpha – some incels, who do not consider themselves to be that ugly/have some redeeming qualities such as money/good job, etc., refer to themselves as betas

Betabuxx – a man who has been able to find a female partner. However, incels believe that this happens when a woman has 'hit the wall' and has lost their sexual market value (SMV) and because they desperately have settled for a man who can (financially) support them. Therefore, incels dislike and are judgemental of men who betabuxx, believing they are being cucked

Blackpill – the incel ideology, the nihilistic version of the redpill (TRP)

Blackops2cel (also known as St.BlackOps2Cel) – drawing on the computer game Call of Duty Black Ops II, where an image of a gamer has been appropriated by incels as physically representative of their community. The individual's name and the origins of the photo are unknown but he is held to be typical of what an incel looks like

Bluepill – opposite to the redpill (TRP), belief in a false reality, an inability to appreciate nuance and unquestionably accepting conventional sources and convenient tropes

Braincels – r/braincels the most popular incel subreddit after r/incels was removed in 2017. This too was shut down in September 2019, amid concerns that the release of the Hollywood movie *Joker* would encourage further incel inspired attacks.

Buster – a Chad version of a dog

Chad (chadlite, chadrone) – the antithesis of incel, a man who is sexually successful with women. Incels have a complicated relationship with Chads; on the one hand, they despise them for being alpha and winning the 'genetic lottery', while on the other hand, they idolise them for their ability to access and use women

Chang – East Asian Chad

Chadpreet – Indian Chad

Chaddam – Arabic Chad

Cock carousel ('riding the cock carousel') – incels think that women want to have sex with as many alpha Chads as possible

Cope – all incels can do is cope as (according to the blackpill) it is impossible to improve or change their situations, as their problems are structural rather than individual

Cuck – a man whose wife/girlfriend is cheating on him with another man (usually a Chad). There are also racial connotations as the word is often used in relation to a white woman cheating with a black man

Currycel – an incel who is of Indian descent

Dogpill – suggestion that human females prefer to have sex with dogs over human male (virgins)

ER (Saint Elliot, The Supreme Gentleman) – Elliot Rodger, who killed multiple people in Isla Vista, California, in 2014

Fakecel – someone who is not a real incel. They might have had (regular) sex with a legitimate partner (not a sex worker), thus invalidating their incel status

Fap – masturbate

Femcel – female incel; however, (male) incels claim that women cannot really be incels because they all can have sex if they want it.

Femoid (female humanoid, female android) – used to describe women, demonstrating they are subhuman, necessary of dehumanisation

Fuel (suicide fuel, life fuel) – posts which provoke emotion in users

Gf – girlfriend

Gymcel – an incel who copes by going to the gym

Heightcel – a short incel (height is viewed as a determinative of sexual success, and similar to race or bone structure, is seen as immutable and therefore a barrier to incels not being incels)

Hitting the wall – a woman when she reaches her 30s is used up and starts to lose her looks and will settle for a less attractive partner on account of needing the financial security

Hole – a woman, reducing women down to mere sex objects

Hypergamy – originating in the caste system in India meaning dating or marrying up, the belief that women will only mate with high-status males. Involves a co-option of Pareto's 80/20 rule – that the top 20% of men have the top 80% of women competing for them, while the bottom 80% of men are competing for the bottom 20% of women.

Incel – involuntarily celibate, someone who is unable to have sex due to reasons beyond their control

Incels.co (formerly incels.me) currently the most prominent incel forum. Set up in November 2017 after the closure of r/incels and created by Sergeant Incel. Internal surveys suggest that the majority of its members are white.

Inceltears – subreddit dedicated to critiquing incels. Screenshots of extreme and shockingly offensive content are regularly taken from other incel communities and posted, leading to some threads/sites being closed

It – a woman

It's over (followed with 'it never began') – men who are ugly, short, not white, or have small wrists have no possibility of ever being happy or sexually satisfied.

JBW – just be white, belief that women will primarily choose white men to be their sexual or romantic partners

JFL – just fucking lol, used to show incredulity

KTHHFV – kissless, touchless, hugless, handholdless, friendless, virgin – status markers within the incel community

LDAR – lay down and rot

Lifefuel – positivity, enabling incels to regain their faith in humanity (see also whitepill)

Looksmatch – someone who is your match in terms of appearance. Incels claim to be able to objectively rate people's appearance, and optimal relationships are those in which partners are looksmatched

Looksmaxxing – an attempt to improve one's appearance (rejected by incels who in ascribing to the blackpill would not see any point in attempting looksmaxxing)

LMS – looks money status

Manlet – a short incel

Meeks – the idea that women are attracted to men purely on their aesthetic appearance, with no consideration about personality. Drawn from Jeremy Meeks who was dubbed 'America's most attractive felon' after his mugshot went viral and he received significant attention from women while in prison. He later became a fashion model

Mentalcel – a man who is celibate due to his mental health, for example, those who have autistic spectrum disorder (ASD) but can also relate to low intelligence

Mogs (AMOG – alpha male of group, heightmogged, lifemogged) – to be dominated by another man's looks

NEET – not in education, employment or training (not viewed positively among the community)

Noodles – persons of East or Southeast Asian descent

Normie – non-blackpillers/believers, those who have an inferior worldview and belief system, people who are neurotypical, average looking and of average intelligence

Omega – incels below beta

Postmaxx – posting to get likes/attention

Racepill – women are more racist than men due to the partners they choose

Ricecel – an incel who is of East or Southeast Asian descent

r/incels – most prolific incel site that was closed down in November 2017 for inciting violence against women, encouraging rape as well as castration of attractive men.

Roastie – a woman whose labia has stretched to replicate a roast beef sandwich from having sex with lots of men

Rope (fuel) – suicide ideation, something that causes a non-whitepilled incel to want to end their life

SEA – Southeast Asia

SIMP – **S**uckas **I**dolising **M**ediocre **P**ussy, guy overly desperate for women, puts women before men in order to obtain sex, does way too much for women who don't deserve it

SMV – sexual market value

Snake – a woman

Stacy – the most attractive of women, has sex with lots of men (usually Chads) on account of their looks, is stereotypically an unintelligent bimbo

SUI – suicide

Tallcel – a fake incel (tallness equates with sexual success)

Toilet – a woman

TRP – the redpill – rejection and opposite of the bluepill. Allows people to understand the truth about the world. Differs from the blackpill in that it offers the belief that the system can be played

Truecel – true incel, purity of the incel ideology – have never kissed/touched a woman and genuinely are unable to have sex despite having tried

Tyrone – a black man who is a Chad equivalent, has racist and classist connotations. Tyrone might cuck other men, but Stacys will always seek out a white man to settle down with because they have more power and status

Validation seeking – seeking out compliments to boost one's own confidence, for example, women (Beckys) using dating apps for this purpose

Volcel – incels who could have sex (with women) but have voluntarily chosen not to

Whitepill – worldview based on the maximisation of happiness through an individual accepting his situation, a stoic extension of the blackpill

Wristcel – incels who have small wrists

Zeta – incels who consider themselves to be the absolute lowest of the low

Epigraphs

There are two reasons why people don't support the word feminist: The first is they don't know what it means. The second is they do know what it means. Gloria Steinem

Male fantasy is seen as something that can create reality whereas female fantasy is seen as something used for escape. bell hooks.

Chapter 1

An Introduction to Incel

> Humanity … All of my suffering on this world has been at the hands of humanity. Particularly women. It has made me realize just how brutal and twisted humanity is as a species. All I ever wanted was to fit in and live a happy life amongst humanity, but I was cast out and rejected, forced to endure an existence of loneliness and insignificant, all because the females of the human species were incapable of seeing the value in me.

Twenty-two-year-old Elliot Rodger uploaded a 141-page manifesto online shortly before he stabbed and shot people in Isla Vista California 23 May 2014, killing six, and then himself. Rodger was a member of PUAHate (Pick Up Artists, PUAs) and ForeverAlone, online communities that actively espoused misogyny and promoted techniques to manipulate women into sex. 'The girls don't flock to the gentlemen. They flock to the alpha male', Rodger wrote to support his violence. 'Who's the alpha male now, bitches?' His attack spurred women to share their experiences of misogyny online via the hashtag #YesAllWomen and highlighted the lure of the men's rights movement (MRM). Prior to Rodger, though, the term incel was relatively unknown in the wider public sphere, confined to spaces online within the so-called manosphere. The manosphere is comprised of disparate, conflicting and overlapping men's groups, which share a hatred of women and antifeminism (Ging, 2017). After Rodger's attack and subsequent acts of violence inspired by him (see in particular Parkland, 2018; Toronto, 2018, 2020), media attention has turned to incels, presenting them as violent and extremist misogynists. It is notable, however, that Rodger never used the term incel to describe himself, yet he has become an idol, a martyr for the incel cause, revered by many in the community.

Previously, these groups were able to operate relatively undetected or were dismissed as minority deviant fringe groups and subject to limited concern about the harmful impacts of their ideologies. Although there are now significant amounts of interest in online Men's Rights Activists (MRAs) more broadly (Ging, 2017; Jaki et al., 2019; Marwick & Caplan, 2018; Nagle, 2017) due to concerns about

The Incel Rebellion: The Rise of the Manosphere and the Virtual War Against Women, 1–13
Copyright © Lisa Sugiura 2021 Published by Emerald Publishing Limited.

This work is published under the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY 4.0) licence. Anyone may reproduce, distribute, translate and create derivative works of this work (for both commercial and non-commercial purposes), subject to full attribution to the original publication and authors. The full terms of this licence may be seen at http://creativecommons.org/licences/by/4.0/legalcode

All rights of reproduction in any form reserved
doi:10.1108/978-1-83982-254-420211002

their incitement of hatred and violence, particularly against women, there is little understanding about the evolution, formation and spread of incels.

Incel as a subculture is not an isolated phenomenon; it is part of larger backlash against feminism propelled by the manosphere, consisting of groups of men all connected by their belief that feminine values have corrupted society and men need to retaliate against this misandrist culture to preserve their very survival (Marwick & Caplan, 2018). Web 2.0 has facilitated an assortment of particularly toxic digital MRA spaces, what Massanari (2017, p. 329) terms 'toxic technocultures'. These are a loosely connected and amorphous hub for 'men's issues', noted for its virulent antifeminism, extreme misogyny and connections with the alt-right. The uniting ideological feature of the manosphere is an antipathy towards feminism and a pervading sense of (white) male victimisation. Groups within the manosphere involve MRAs, PUAs, Men Going Their Own Way (MGTOW), Tradcons, NoFappers, Fathers for Justice, as well as incels. Although the main interests of each group may differ, their common language creates a unified identity. Although incel is receiving increased academic scrutiny, when undertaking the research for this book, there was limited engagement with those who self-identify as incel to understand their motivations and behaviours and their evolution and spread. Studies focussing on incels have been notoriously difficult to conduct, due to the evasive and hostile nature of those who are involuntarily celibate (Burgess, Donelly, Dillar, & Davis, 2001). Research of the incel community is in its infancy but is a growing area of interest; to date, incel studies have examined the underlying misogynistic framework constructing the incel ideology (Baele, Brace, & Coan, 2019; O'Malley, Holt, & Holt, 2020; Witt, 2020); some have compared (Hoffman, Ware, & Shapiro, 2020) or contrasted (Cottee, 2020) what they perceive to be incel terrorism with Islamist and right-wing counterparts; others have done this alongside policy framework suggestions seeking to prevent future attacks by the radicalised (Tomkinson, Harper, & Attwell, 2020). There have also been notable analyses of the content of specific online forums frequented by incels (Ging, 2017) – demonstrating the world view therein (Baele et al., 2019), the presence of femmephobia and the hatred of hyper-femininity (Menzie, 2020) and, finally, misogyny, victimhood and fatalism (Cottee, 2020). There is also literature regarding incels written from a journalistic standpoint (see Beauchamp, 2019; Kim, 2014; Penny, 2014a, b; Tait, 2018; Williamson, 2018). This book, however, addresses the void within the current cannon relating to the examination of the culture and formation of incels and situates this within a criminological feminist framework.

The purpose of this book is to provide an informed and cultural understanding into incel and more broadly the scope and nature of the manosphere. Although this book explores the rhetoric and ideology espoused within the manosphere and the sorts of groups encompassed within these online spaces, the particular focus is on those who identify as involuntary celibates. This book will consider the historical origins of the MRM pre-internet and how it evolved, including its change in perspective from initially supporting feminism to viewing it as problematic and the cause of men's emasculation and wider societal failings; to show how the emergence of incel aligned with this ideology.

The link between the alt-right, incel and the larger manosphere has been debated (Beauchamp, 2019; Nagle, 2017; Ribeiro et al., 2020; Stokel-Walker, 2021; Young, 2019). Consisting of people on the political right who have established their own movement distinct from the mainstream Republican establishment, the alt-right relates to white nationalists, white supremacists and race realists, as well as neo-nazis or neo fascists. Incels deny any connections with the alt-right or, indeed, having a political purpose; however, there are overlapping ideologies, which will be addressed in this book.

I also consider the role digital technologies play in propagating violence and hatred against women, particularly the ways in which anti-feminist rhetoric and ideology on platforms such as YouTube, Reddit and 4chan appears to be deliberately targeted towards young men and boys and presented as harmless or satirical media in the forms of images, videos and memes. Reddit, in particular, was a key location for this research. A social news platform enabling users to discuss and vote on content submitted by users, Reddit originated from the United States and is one of the most widely used platforms globally with 430 million active users monthly worldwide.[1] Comprising myriad topics, including niche information undiscoverable elsewhere, Reddit is a hotbed of satire and memes birthing cultural trends, hence it is extremely popular with younger people. While there is some moderation, there is abundant inappropriate content including pornography, violent material, suicide tips and hate speech, thus providing the natural environment for incel to flourish.

The central argument of this book is that although incels are an extreme manifestation of misogyny, their problematic attitudes are not contained to the online spaces they frequent, rather they are symbolic of structural misogyny and patriarchal systems of socialisation. Moreover, the ideology espoused within incel communities is interwoven with the wider socio-political climate. This type of extremist behaviour is not confined to online spaces but is exacerbated by digital technologies. Providing significant implications for research, policy and practice in regard to new forms and representations of hatred and extremism, this book is of interest to a broad range of practitioners, law enforcement and scholars across criminology, sociology, terrorism studies, gender, media and cultural studies, politics, as well as expanding the field of cybercrime research and beyond.

The growth of a misogynistic ideology manifested in incel has discreetly grown more ubiquitous leading to the emergence of what has been termed a domestic terrorism threat (Hoffman et al., 2020). It is difficult to ascertain the exact numbers of incels worldwide; however, users and visits to incel sites indicate that members are in the tens of thousands, while the media has emphasised an apparent significant following in North America and Europe. Although only a small minority of those ascribing to the incel ideology mobilise to actual physical violence, incels are presenting a major challenge for law enforcement and security services focussed on countering terrorism and extremist violence, with fears about

[1]https://www.statista.com/topics/5672/reddit/#dossierSummary

incel and male supremacist radicalisation and ideological grooming amongst the cacophony of misogynistic and hate-fuelled bile on incel spaces.

Drawing on extensive research involving analysis of various types of online data and interviews with incels, this book provides original and timely insight into this subcultural group, the development of the 'Manosphere', how and why people join these communities and self-identify as incels and the extent to which the influence and philosophy of incel and the incelsphere draws on and is penetrating mainstream culture and political discourse, as well as the harmful impacts. This book also explores the assumption that it is ordinarily young white Western males who not only appear to populate the majority of such groups but who are also targeted by the men's rights discourse and propaganda disseminated on social media platforms. Discussions within this book will highlight the many contradictions present in incel ideology, arguments and behaviours and to question whether these are deliberate – in order to confuse outsiders, or if these are unrecognised or ignored within the incel community, obscured by a greater purpose of adhering to incel culture. There is a great deal of content within incel communities, designed to troll or snare outsiders, who can then be accused of cherry-picking content. It is fundamental to be critical of the material available, and I have attempted to parse out what is bona fide incel subject matter or representative of incel philosophies, informed by the individuals I directly spoke with.

Incel

The term incel is a portmanteau of the words involuntary and celibate, those who adopt the name view themselves as unsuccessful in obtaining sex and romantic relationships, with those they desire. The etymology of the term can be traced to a queer female student – Alana Boltwood– in 1993, who in seeking support from like-minded others, on her website, described incel as 'anybody of any gender who was lonely, had never had sex or who hadn't had a relationship in a long time'. From its original virtuous intentions, incel has since been appropriated (foremost by men) and has come to represent a community solidified in its hatred towards women. This is in contrast to the gender inclusive community formerly envisaged.

In much of the academic literature, incel has been described as a movement (Conley, 2020; Hoffman et al., 2020; Menzie, 2020; Palma, 2019; Papadamou et al., 2020; Salojärvi, Rantanen, Nieminen, Juote, & Hanhela, 2020; Tomkinson et al., 2020; van der Veer, 2020; Witt, 2020). The incel wiki, however, describes incel as 'a life circumstance not a movement/community' – thus rejecting the notion of incels being members of anything. Regardless, the position of this book is that community is a more accurate term to describe how incels operate. This is not to say that there are no attempts to change or develop society (in their favour) and certainly there are definite efforts to influence their perspectives upon others, to disseminate the 'blackpill' – the overarching incel philosophy – and understand the 'truth' about not only incel's existence but how and why the world is unfairly structured for women and good-looking men. What draws men into inceldom, however,

and to self-ascribe the incel moniker, is the sharing of the common attitudes and interests that have brought together many who are lonely, vulnerable and seeking solidarity, as well as an explanation for their problems. Further, there is an element of revelling in superior clandestine knowledge, which contradicts the notion of attempts by the community to embed incel in the mainstream (although this is occurring nevertheless). How and why young men are becoming and remaining incels is explored further in Chapters 3 and 4, in terms of the appealing mechanisms (Chapter 3) and the responses that validate and perpetuate individuals to continue their incel journey (Chapter 4). Also, in the latter, interestingly ex-incels, those who have ascended – were able to leave the community – speak of feeling as if they were part of a cult. This is an interesting and concerning claim, and although I do not explore incel as a cult in depth, there is scope to describe it in this manner, albeit with further research.

I adopt the position incel as a community – as per Rheingold's (1993) 'virtual community' – incels are a form of social aggregation that have emerged online from sufficient amounts of people interacting and conducting in public discussions, sharing alliances and forming bonds, which are also grounded in their everyday physical worlds. It is not my intention, however, to present incels as one homogeneous community devoid of individual thought or behaviours. Due to the many different spaces utilised by incels online, there are differing incel communities, which demonstrate some variation in the content they post (and the levels of hate they present) depending on what platform is being used. Nor, am I suggesting that there are different incel communities in accordance with different platforms or websites that they frequent, as that is simply not the case. Many incels engage with a variety of different online spaces – those who are completely dedicated to incel as well as more mainstream social media and may post as an incel or pertaining to other aspects of their identity. Regardless, the term community will often be used throughout this book rather than the plural communities; however, the term should be noted as incorporating these recognised distinctions. There are diverse members, interpretations and applications of the ideologies encompassed within the umbrella identity of 'incel'.

Incels like to present themselves as countercultural to the mainstream (Chang, 2020) and are recognised as a subcultural group (O'Malley et al., 2020). Here though, Rheingold's (1993) insight into the workings of virtual communities is helpful to appreciate the subtleties involved in what on the surface appears to be a homogeneity of misogynistic attitudes and behaviours, 'there is no such thing as a single, monolithic, online subculture; it's more like an ecosystem of subcultures, some frivolous, others serious' (p. 3).

Much of what occurs within incel spaces is deliberately provocative and shocking, a form of shitposting and ironic humour. Yet, this does not dismiss how the encouragement and incitement of hatred and violence propagated by some incels could also be viewed as a movement to strike back at feminism and women's increased rights. Posts with the phrase 'going ER', meaning to go Elliot Rodger, or even describing the mass murderer as 'saint Elliot' are worryingly plentiful on incel forums. Whether this is a genuine desire to enact violence or an attempt at warped humour, though the intentions may differ, symbolically they form part of

a call to arms to engage in a virtual war against women, that has very real and very harmful offline consequences. As Powell, Stratton, and Cameron (2018) note in their book *Digital Criminology*, this type of extremist behaviour is not limited to online spaces and is exacerbated by digital technologies, which is embedded within our everyday lives as a result of the symbiotic relationship between society and technology.

The incel community that is recognisable today has developed online since the mid-2000s and has particularly gained traction since 2015. Although there has been an emphasis on frustrated virgins, some incels have had sex, but have since been rejected, been single for a long time or slept with a sex worker (which in the incel community doesn't count). The emphasis is on heteronormative partnerships, and generally incels are men who are unable to attract [the] women [they want]. There is a mass of contradiction amongst incel beliefs. First, the adoption of the name itself, involuntary implies that this is something which they have no choice in, but there is indeed an element of choice in self-identifying as an incel as it is not a term ascribed by others. Certainly, the labelling process (Becker, 1963) and resulting negativity applies, but this is only after the individual establishes themselves in those terms. Furthermore, the application of the term celibate is also problematic, as already highlighted, sometimes it is not the fact that such men are unable to attract women, rather it is more that it is not the type of women they think they deserve. This is even acknowledged by incels who adopt volceldom – whereby some choose to be voluntarily celibate; however, the distinction between inceldom and volceldom is undeniably blurred. This leads to another conundrum, incels view themselves as zeta males, the lowest of the low. If this is indeed the case, then according to the incel attractiveness scale, they would not be able to appeal to the more aesthetically beautiful woman, nor should they believe they should. The way they present themselves is that they are unattractive to any women but also they in turn don't find all women attractive, for example, they are quick to call overweight women 'landwhales' and emphasise how they would not want to be intimate with them. The significance placed on looks is also antithetical to the criticisms levelled at women for being uniquely superficial and shallow. In selecting to become an incel, there is a conscientious rejection of women and sexual and romantic relationships with women, which ironically then causes bitterness and resentment as these are the very things that such individuals are craving.

There are some small numbers of women who identify as incel; however, they are less conspicuous and not entirely welcomed within the communities, certainly with the levels of hatred that are directed towards women in these spaces. These are men who have very little, if any, interaction with women, and so the irony is that they are barring women who can empathise with their issues of loneliness and rejection. Women who identify as incel are known as femcels. Femcels' legitimacy is generally rejected by incels, who believe that women will always be able to procure sex, irrespective of their looks or circumstances, as men have higher sex drives and so are willing to perform sexually with all and any women (again contradictory to the ethos of incel as described previously). Femcels have been described as 'entitled women who play the victim to get sympathy and attention

from men but refuse to lower their standards'.[2] The notion that it is necessary for men to have sex whilst women just submit to it is deeply entrenched. Due to the fact that the majority of incels are indeed men, and to date, there have been no issues or concerns regarding female incels in terms of espousing hatred against others or violent enactments, this work is focussed on male incels, and where gender is not explicitly mentioned when the term incel is presented, the default position is that male incels are being referred to.

A misconception of incels is that they are predominantly all angry white Western young men. In a survey conducted of incels by incels on the incel.co site around half of the members stated that they were white. However, there is an increased focus on white young male incels, mainly originating from North America and Europe in the media and academia, perhaps in part due to those who have engaged in violent attacks (though it is noted that Elliot Rodger was Asian American and Alek Minassian is Armenian, although they could be described as 'white presenting'). Moreover, there does appear to be an increased presence of white, English-speaking men on incel forums, which could be explained in terms of privilege and access, as well as English being the dominant language of the internet. However, incel communities also include specific groups of incels based on ethnicity, who, as a result of not being white, face further rejection from women. As many incel communities are English speaking, such non-white individuals may face further discriminations in not being confident to engage in many conversations due to not being fully articulate in the English language, and so it is not necessarily the case that there is a lack of representation from incels of different ethnic backgrounds but that they are not at the forefront of incel activity. The different intersections between gender, ethnicity, class and ableism in the representation of incels will be explored further in this book, as well as how homosexual sexual orientation, as well as transgenderism are disregarded as they have no place within the incel world view.

The link between incels and those who are neurodiverse has received increased attention following the trial of Alek Minassian in which he attempted to use this as a defence. Many incels are thought to be on the autistic spectrum, demonstrating characteristics such as problems in socially interacting with others and having unusual and prolonged emotional reactions. It could well be the case that those with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) are more vulnerable to the lure of the ideas espoused within the incel community; however similar to the stereotyping of all hackers as autistic (Bolgan, Mosca, McLean, & Rusconi, 2016; Seigfried-Spellar, O'Quinn, & Treadway, 2015), making such connections as an explanation for deviance or criminality leads to stigmatisation and alienation. Moreover, with significant numbers of people believed to be neurodiverse worldwide, for example, in the United Kingdom, 1 in 100 people are on the autism spectrum, with around 700,000 adults and children,[3] the odds are likely that there will be incels with this condition, especially because online they may be more comfortable interacting

[2]https://melmagazine.com/en-us/story/femcels-vs-incels-meaning-reddit-discord
[3]https://www.autism.org.uk/

and often frequent the web spaces where they may be exposed to incel ideology and, not least, may identify more with what the incel philosophy presents them about a world which they may find difficult to understand.

The Blackpill

Incels ascribe to a nihilistic ideology named the blackpill, which cements the realisation of being an incel. The blackpill is comprised of commonly held beliefs, such as hypergamy, the 'just be white' (JBW) theory, the 80/20 rule of dating, lookism, the halo effect and sexual racism that rely on pseudoscience – where incels seek evidence to support to their claims, rather than a scientific approach, which would strive to prove a claim by seeking evidence, which may prove that claim to be false, amid uncritical interpretations of evolutionary biology and psychology studies, as well as studies undertaken by dating sites. At the core, feminism is viewed as the scourge of all men's, but especially, incels' problems, obstacles that are due to genetics, cannot be overcome. Deconstructed, the blackpill involves the accumulation of statistics used to validate their perspectives, along with images and memes used to describe and visualise incel thoughts and feelings, which are usually bleak and denigrating women for being egocentric, cruel and shallow.

In becoming 'blackpilled' incels accept their lot in life – that they are the zeta males who will never attract the women they want, and so turn their backs upon women and societal values regarding relationships and equality, which often manifests as hatred. It is important to note that often frustration is exerted about the type of women incels believe they should be entitled to, which appears contradictory when incels also present themselves as the lowest status of male. It is not necessarily the case that incels are unable to obtain sexual or romantic relationships with women, rather it is not the women they believe they should be with nor is it on the terms they want to determine. This suggests that choice in partners is something that only men should benefit from, and so when men are affected by past experiences where women have refused their advances, the blackpill provides an appealing explanation for their rejections external to themselves. Instead of viewing disinterest from some women as natural and to be expected, rejection is something that most people will encounter; it has devastating impacts whereby it shapes an individual's identity making them susceptible to this ideology, which provides them with the reasons for such failures. Incels are eager to validate their ideas and rely on various pseudoscientific studies and research, which they claim substantiates their blackpill ideology. Incels accuse others, who don't share their viewpoint, of not engaging with or not being open to such research, and therefore disregard dissenting opinion as being uninformed and unworthy of consideration. Though the incitement of hatred is not explicitly part of the blackpill philosophy, the deprecation of women and progressiveness is unmistakable to see. Therefore, to incels, misogyny is a natural outcome of being blackpilled; this is reinforced by broader structures that denigrate women and support the violence that is conducted on an endemic scale against them. Hence, though violence isn't necessarily sanctioned by the incel world view, it is undeniably attractive to those who are that way inclined as well as presenting some

rather mixed messages about needing to retaliate against women and the society that has supposedly privileged them over men. Moreover, though there are the odd members (that usually get removed for doing so) that criticise the aggression and violent attitudes towards women, the majority of the incel community do not openly condemn the violence, instead presenting what seems like approval masked with irony.

Although the blackpill is formulated and spread via online incel communities, it did not occur within a vacuum, and its origins can be traced offline through the emergence of historical MRA groups. It also crosses over with the redpill ideology permeating other groups within the manosphere and the alt-right. The redpill draws on the film the Matrix, whereby the protagonist, Neo, is presented with a choice about taking the redpill or the bluepill. If he takes the bluepill, he can continue to live blissfully unaware of the façade he is currently living in, whereas if he takes the redpill, he will know the truth about the world. The narrative of the film is so well known that it's not a spoiler to say that the film proceeds with Neo taking the redpill.

In the manosphere, the redpill is a rejection of the bluepill – whereby the conventional media sources (what incels refer to as 'normie fakesteam media' – source incel wiki) and banalities about romantic relationships are unquestionably accepted. Incels consider the vast majority of the population to be bluepilled and criticise bluepillers for their lack of original thought and adhering to comforting well-versed tropes supporting common world view. Hence, the redpill represents a counterculture challenging prevailing social norms, focussing on physical attraction and sexual success. To the PUAs, the redpill represents the game required for men to improve their confidence and become sexually attractive to women. To the MRAs, the redpill is the understanding that society is gynocentric, discriminating against men rather than women. The redpill is also understood in political terms, particularly in alt-right communities, relating to self-identified reactionary right wing/conservatives. Whilst the use of the political sense of the term usually implies belief in the PUA and the MRA application of the term, belief in the PUA or the MRA sense of the redpill does not necessarily mean support for the political sense of the term. It is worth noting that the redpill has never been applied to left-wing politics in any context, although misogyny does occur within those domains too. According to the incel wiki, not all redpillers are incels and not all incels are redpillers; however, the majority of incels are blackpilled, which is essentially the fatalistic version of the redpill. The outcome of the blackpill is cynicism and hopelessness, whilst with the redpill aspiration remains, as this presents the notion that it is still possible to game the system if you know how to.

As ideology is integral to analyses of incels, it is therefore necessary to define the term. In basic terms, ideology is a set of beliefs and values held by an individual or group, which act as a lens through which individuals or groups interpret or understand the world. Feminist critical discourse scholar, Michelle Lazar (2007, p. 146) describes ideologies as 'group-based sociocognitive, representations of practices in the service of power'. Meanwhile, Žižek (1989) draws attention to the concept of false consciousness within ideologies – the various processes through which certain groups are made to accept the inherent inequality and

unfairness of the status quo. However, rather than constructing ideology simply as false consciousness, Žižek (1989) views ideology as being supported by false consciousness. This is understood to mean that the pseudo-scientific theories, social Darwinism and biological and psychological essentialism relied on by incels are not themselves ideology, rather they are elements of the false consciousness supporting the ideologies of incel communities.

Aim of the Research

The research presented in this book was driven by the aim to study the development of online incel communities and its impacts, with the primary objective of ascertaining the individual aspects and group dynamics of incel communities and exploring how and why people join them. Specific secondary objectives were:

- To identify the defining attributes of an incel.
- To determine incel ideology and how this aligns with the broader MRAs and the alt-right.
- To explore platforms used to spread the incel ideology.
- To understand why people self-identify as incel and the experiences that have led them to this realisation.
- To understand what motivates people to join incel communities.
- To explore how these communities operate and whether there is evidence of grooming and recruitment to the movement.
- To examine forms of hatred and extremism evident in these communities and how they are inciting violence, blurring on and offline behaviours.

Methodology

The methodology utilised in this research was twofold. First, in order to explore how online cultures and networks are enabling misogynistic extremist and violent behaviours, an online ethnographic approach, Netnography (Kozinets, 2015, 2019), was utilised. The methods involved non-participant observation and thematic analysis of publicly available discussions and videos, comments on social media platforms during 2017–2021 – Reddit, 4chan, Twitter, YouTube, incels.co/is, incel.net – frequented by incels and MRAs. For this part of the study, there was no direct interaction with users/posters, but rather time was spent on the sites, and the author did not need to become a member of any communities to access data. Relevant posts were collected via manual means – copying and pasting, analysing memes and videos on YouTube chosen by starting with search terms such as 'blackpill' and then using the recommended feature to explore how the platform's algorithms promote such content and technical means using NodeXL,[4] which obtains tweets over the previous seven days. The online observations equated to more than 100 hours, with 10,264 pieces of data analysed.

[4]https://www.smrfoundation.org/nodexl/

Data were excluded from analysis if they were clear that the poster did not identify as an incel and was blatantly an outsider to the community, for example, posts from users who criticise incels and their belief systems.

Second, the research involved 10 qualitative semi-structured interviews with self-identified incels ($n = 7$) and those who identify as ex-incels ($n = 3$) online during 2019. To the best of my knowledge, I was the first academic to have conducted direct interviews with persons from the incel community, although it is acknowledged that journalists did so before me, and digital culture expert, Kaitlyn Regehr (2020), engaged in interviews with incels supported by a UK television network. My participants were identified from snowball and convenience sampling and were all men. As noted previously, there are some women who identify as incel, and the advertisement recruiting for the research did not specifically request men; however, it was only men who came forward to be interviewed. It is worth noting that this might be due to the spaces in which I was targeting, being less welcoming to female incels, as well as the potential reluctance of female incels to be interviewed.

Before commencing this research project, I was contacted via my university email by incels of their own accord, who had seen me quoted in a national newspaper story about them (Tait, 2018). By wanting to provide their voices and experiences, they already indicated their willingness to take part in research and so when this research was decided, I already had some interview participants. Other participants were contacted via Reddit r/exredpill, r/incelswithouthate and by searching Reddit for phrases like 'I am/ I used to be an incel' and were messaged via Reddit's messaging service to invite them to interview. These forums were chosen with my safety in mind and were deemed to be less hostile than other incel spaces. Interviews were conducted online via email or private messages on Reddit. Although interviewees were offered the option of telephone or Skype interviews, none took up these modes of interview, preferring instead to remain within the online spaces they usually inhabit. Highlighting the significance of interacting with participants in the places they usually frequent and are comfortable in and of them being able to preserve their anonymity. For those who undertook email interviews, there is the suggestion that they were less concerned about anonymity than those who wanted to remain on Reddit and talk there. Those interviewees on email were happy to divulge what seemed to be their actual first names, as opposed to those on Reddit who remained masked by their Reddit usernames. Ethical approval was obtained from the University Faculty Ethics Committee, with particular regard to the sensitivity of the topic, the usual ethical considerations of obtaining informed consent from the interview participants and protection of confidentiality and anonymity, as well as issues specific to online research regarding the use of publicly available data. I have replaced the usernames of interview participants with pseudonyms in order to protect their identities and ensure that they are untraceable online, especially as incels tend to reuse the same name across different platforms. The pseudonyms I applied are notably different to the majority of usernames within incel spaces, which often consist of the term 'cel' at the end to signify being an incel or are descriptions or references to their appearance, situation or manga/anime/science fiction related. In attempting

to protect those who engaged in my research, I have instead used generic male names that in no way bear any significance as to the individual or the username within the incel community or are part of the incel vocabulary.

Additionally, the irony in my being a woman speaking with self-confessed woman-haters did not escape me, and through the process, I continually engaged in self-reflection, and extra care and attention was taken with my questions and responses during the interviews. I was also careful about what information was publicly available about myself so as to mitigate any negative preconceptions about me that could impact upon the research. Nevertheless, online I was open about my being a feminist, which could have been a 'red-flag' to some, but which was not directly challenged, although there were indications that some participants were aware of this aspect of my identity. I address this and other ethical tensions in conducting this research, in previous publications (Lavorgna & Sugiura, 2020; Sugiura 2021). Upon conducting the interviews, I was surprised to discover the ease in which incels opened up to me, indicating that they are willing to speak to anyone who is willing to listen to them. The suggestion was that they do not feel that people want to pay attention to them or hear what they have to say. A critical reflexive perspective is integrated throughout this book, with self-reflections underpinning my analyses and interpretations presented where relevant.

The concepts of hegemonic masculinities (Connell, 1995; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005) and aggrieved entitlement (Kimmel, 2008) are employed to understand the correlation between violence and crime and reflect the socially approved standards against which subordinate masculinities are measured (particularly pertinent for incels who view themselves as 'zeta' males). The notion of masculinity in crisis is also explored – a claim purported within the manosphere, particularly in relation to the growth in women's equality and feminism (Faludi, 1991) along with feminist concepts such as Dianne Herman's (1989) rape culture, Liz Kelly's (1987) continuum of sexual violence and Elizabeth (Betsy) Stanko's (1990) everyday violence and intimate intrusions. Elements of my previously established theoretical framework, 'Respectable deviance' (Sugiura, 2018), will also be utilised to inform the incel narratives, such as the construction of deviance (Becker, 1963), techniques of neutralization (Sykes & Matza, 1957) – especially denial of victim (particularly where the assumption of victim status is undertaken by incels) and denial of responsibility – and presentation of self (Goffman, 1959).

The rest of this book is structured accordingly, with Chapters 2–5 substantiated with empirical research data: Chapter 2 considers the emergence and development of the manosphere in order to situate the historical context of incel and address why it is seemingly young, white males who not only appear to populate the majority of such groups but who are targeted by the discourse and propaganda propagated on various social media platforms; Chapter 3 titled 'Join the Incel Rebellion' utilises masculinity theories and explores whether young men are being recruited, groomed and effectively radicalised into a hate-fuelled ideology online. Chapter 4 – 'Weirdos or Extremists?' – then explores the problems in pathologising incels as deviant 'others' and draws on the sociology of deviance, subcultural, gender and feminist theory to understand the lure of the manosphere and the appeal of rejecting progressive social values. This chapter considers the main

mechanisms and platforms being used to show how messages and symbolism in mainstream media are appropriated by such online communities to promote their beliefs; whilst their language is increasingly infiltrating common vocabulary, reinforcing misogynistic, homophobic and racist rhetoric, drawing parallels with the alt-right; whilst Chapter 5 looks at the legitimisation of misogyny and the impact of leaders such as Jordan B. Peterson, Roosh V, Paul Elam, Milo Yiannopoulos and Donald Trump when they espouse the same right-wing rhetoric as that propagated by incels, MRAs and the alt-right, yet are protected by a veneer of respectability, albeit a respectability eschewed on power and privilege. Finally, the conclusion reiterates the central argument of this book, that the ideology espoused by groups such as incels in the manosphere is linked with the wider sociopolitical climate, and this type of extremist behaviour is not confined to online spaces. It pre-existed the internet and continues to co-exist alongside it but is exacerbated and enabled by digital technologies. Wider rhetorical questions around gender expectations and entitlement, and legal redress and responsibility of social media platforms, arising from the research findings are also presented, as well as the threat from such ideology to societal progression and equality.

Incels bond through the denigration of women; this provides them with the power that they think they lack. They are seeking dominance, which ends up being counterintuitive to the emotional and physical intimacy they desire. From the perspective of some incels (and parts of the wider manosphere), women have won the war; they have made men into an oppressed class, and now they need to be prepared for men to retaliate and fight back. This book will address the reality of the incel 'rebellion' and the broader 'virtual' war against women, which, in reality, is not just confined online.

This page intentionally left blank

Chapter 2

The Emergence and Development of the Manosphere

This chapter situates the historical context of incel by outlining the key developments that led to the emergence of the manosphere online to show how incel did not occur in isolation, rather the ideology underpinning what it is to be an incel is rooted in the belief systems of pre-established men's groups. Although incels claim not to be politically motivated, with individuals being aligned with either the left or right, or apolitical, their philosophies about women's rights and society are inevitably political, and so party allegiances are a moot issue. The background to the development of Men's Rights Activists (MRAs), tracing it back to the pre-digital technology era with the Men's Rights Movement (MRM) in the 1970s and its links with the Women's Liberation Movement (WLM), is considered to show how initially these groups advocated each other, recognising the pejorative impact of the patriarchy on both men and women. However, the MRM later experienced much discord, predominantly fuelled by apprehensions from cisgender white men about their perceived diminishing social status, which resulted in a volte-face whereby feminism became the adversary. Whilst feminism throughout its various waves, though fundamentally concerned with women's rights and issues, is not anti-men's rights nor misandrist, despite claims to the contrary, still maintains how damage is inflicted on everyone, irrespective of sex or gender, through the enforcement of strict sex and gender roles. Notwithstanding splinter groups acting under the guise of feminism such as Society for Cutting Up Men (SCUM; Solano) that did have the elimination of men as their agenda. This chapter outlines the evolution and development of Men's Rights groups online, including MRAs, Men Going Their Own Way (MGTOW), Pick Up Artists (PUAs) and Fathers for Justice. These groups and incels are all connected by the same underpinning anti-feminist ideology, namely the redpill and the blackpill that have subtle distinctions and engage in trolling and harassment tactics that embody internet culture but are driven by the same motivations as the earlier men's rights groups. Drawing on masculinity theory, this chapter will consider what makes

The Incel Rebellion: The Rise of the Manosphere and the Virtual War Against Women, 15–36
Copyright © Lisa Sugiura 2021 Published by Emerald Publishing Limited.

This work is published under the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY 4.0) licence. Anyone may reproduce, distribute, translate and create derivative works of this work (for both commercial and non-commercial purposes), subject to full attribution to the original publication and authors. The full terms of this licence may be seen at http://creativecommons.org/licences/by/4.0/legalcode

All rights of reproduction in any form reserved
doi:10.1108/978-1-83982-254-420211004

predominantly young cisgender white males vulnerable to the propaganda and incel ideology, leading to them being ensconced within such communities.

The Origins of the MRM

Rooted in the early 1970s and established alongside the WLM, the origins of the MRM, the Men's Liberation Movement (MLM) was initially an ally of feminism, with shared acknowledgement of the damage incurred by both men and women from rigidly enforced sex roles (Messner, 1998). It was recognised that not only was sexism harmful to women, but men also suffered as a result of strictly enforced expectations of masculinity resulting from the patriarchy, as psychologist Jack Sawyer (1970, p. 1) stated 'male liberation calls for men to free themselves from the sex role stereotypes that limit their ability to be human'. Stereotypes included how men related to women, questions of power and dominance in public and private life and the ability to fully express emotions.

It was generally educated men in colleges and universities who engaged with feminist ideas and politics and attempted to understand their role and how they too experienced negative impacts from the issues harming women. However, from the outset, there were tensions within the MLM, in particular the paradox of recognising that, on the one hand, men benefit from systemic privileges, whilst, on the other hand, certain masculine pressures are harmful to them. Pleck (1974, 1995) attempted to navigate this complexity by asserting that though they hold institutional power in patriarchal societies, most men do not actually feel powerful, creating a further conundrum for men to reconcile with – why do they not feel powerful when they are supposed to? Pleck (1974, 1995, p. 7) argued that the male sex role, which necessitated men having to compete and publicly win, was emotionally fraught, which in turn led to men feeling that women had what he termed 'expressive power' and 'masculinity-validating' power over them. Men are dependent on women's power to express their emotions and to validate men's masculinity; however, this is not necessarily a role that women wanted to attain, rather these are powers bestowed upon them by men, who see their ultimate validation in terms of heterosexual success.

In essence, the MLM was premised on a liberal acknowledgement of sex roles, with uncomfortable regard as to men's position as oppressors of women and disregarded by some men's liberationists, who argued that women and men were equally oppressed by sexism. In this context, the concept of oppression was depoliticised to apply to a general impact experienced by everyone within a sexist society. This notion of sex role symmetry, where both men and women are harmed by sex roles, impacted upon both the MLM's ability to support and denounce feminism. Moreover, the women's movement was also affected by this alliance, with a discord between liberal and radical feminists in particular, with the former viewing the movement as more inclusive and concerned with the sex role debate to psychologically liberate both sexes, whilst the latter concentrated their efforts on tackling misogyny and removing men's institutionalised privileges which gave them power over women. Carol Hanisch (1975) claimed that the real issue for men's liberation was capitalism, as their grievance was with their jobs and the pressures to be financially successful. Yet, this was unrecognised by the MLM, which consisted mainly of white, educated 'white collar' men focussing on their

challenges of being the breadwinners and stifling their emotions, and was also limited by class and race blindness.

The language of sex role theory has been described as a departure from biological essentialism. Philosopher Judith Butler (1990) famously called upon society to enact 'gender trouble' and disrupt the binary view of sex, gender and sexuality. Butler argued that gender, rather than being an essential quality derived from biological sex, or an inherent identity, is an act, which grows out of, reinforces and is reinforced by societal norms and creates the illusion of binary sex. The problem lies with the inclusion of the term role, which implies immutability, as such sociologists tend to discuss issues of race, gender and class as identities or relations, which consider the impact of historical and politicised constructions. The currency of incels is grounded in biological essentialism, yet they demonstrate sex role stereotypical socialisation processes. They dissolve into individualistic, voluntaristic levels of analysis rather than institutional analyses of relations of power between groups (aside from claiming the power that women have in the sexual marketplace (SMP)), they normalise a universal male sex role – middle-class, white heterosexual, such that any difference from this appears as deviance, and incels resort to categorical dichotomisation of men and women, based on uninformed biologically essentialist assumptions about binary male and female sex categories.

Emotions and the emotional expression of men was a central focus of the MLM, relying on the personal rather than political, a substitution that continues with men's movements today. Professor and feminist social activist, bell hooks (2004, p. 60, 66), claims that second-wave feminists rejected this in subconscious support of hegemonic masculinity and patriarchy, adhering to a narrow masculine construct in which emotions, aside from anger, are suppressed. During the MLM, many men were embracing and reflecting on their emotions, often for the first time, and wanting to transform themselves. This emotional exploration, hooks (2004) states, was often not welcome within feminist spaces, with these men labelled 'narcissistic or needy … attention seekers, patriarchal manipulators trying to steal the stage with their drama' (p. 7). Feminists rejected such men for fear of them attempting to take over the feminist movement, hooks argues. In addition, some women were still committed to the narrow constructs of hegemonic masculinity, in which emotional expression is weak and unwelcome, a commitment that continued to support a patriarchal society. There is validity to both the critiques made by second-wave feminists at that time and the more contemporary critiques of hooks. Patriarchy, as hooks affirms, is not just upheld and maintained by men; women can and do work to maintain patriarchy as well. Connell (1995) suggested that men who tried to resist patriarchal masculinity in the 1970s were 'likely to be met with derision from many other men, and from some women', highlighting an 'almost journalistic cliché that women despise Sensitive New Age Guys' and that these men did 'not necessarily get warm support from feminist women' (quoted in hooks, 2004, p. 32, 74). The notion that every man within the MLM was entirely committed to resisting the patriarchy is challenged by Kimmel (2017), who claims that when feminism moved from critiquing sex roles to critiquing the personal – specifically men's violent behaviours – in establishing rape, sexual harassment and domestic abuse as part of the gender dynamics under their inquiry, men's liberation departed from feminism. The substituting of the personal for the political

without the recognition that, for women and many other marginalised groups, the personal will always be political was problematic to second-wave feminists and continues to be problematic today. Whilst current scholars, such as Jackson Katz (2006), draw attention to hegemonic masculinity and emotional expression, they use a feminist lens. No such lens was used by the men's liberationists as they continued their depoliticised emotional exploration.

The notion of an MLM coinciding with feminism to enact progressive personal and social change was advocated by men's rights scholars, who positioned men's liberation as the obvious counterpart of women's liberation. Notable texts included Warren Farrell's *The Liberated Man*, Marc Feigan Fasteau's *The Male Machine* and Jack Nichols' *Men's Liberation*. Warren Farrell was on the board of the National Organization for Women's (NOW) New York City chapter, and it was through this role that he commenced the organisation of a nationwide network of men's consciousness groups. In these sessions, and in his 1974 book *The Liberated Man*, Farrell argued that women were not the only ones suffering due to sexism, men were hurting too because they were compelled to be the breadwinners and bear the brunt of the financial responsibility for supporting their families. In addition, men were forced to stifle and hide their emotions. Farrell delivered role reversal workshops, focussing on the effects of sexism on women and men, whereby women were reduced to their appearance and men to their monetary value. Workshops included male beauty pageants where men were forced to strip, pose and receive catcalls from women and activities which saw women organised into rows based on their earning prowess, with those at the lower end of the scale branded 'losers'. Indicating that they were able to disassociate comfortably from women's experiences, the men appeared to enjoy their role play and didn't necessarily succumb to feeling humiliated or degraded. Women, however, would leave their role play activities early, such was the discomfort they felt. Farrell's impact and recognition as a feminist at that time led to *The Chicago Tribune* hailing him 'the Gloria Steinem of Men's Liberation'. Nevertheless, there are early indications of his future change in allegiances, and to his evolution as the 'father of modern-day MRAs', with comments he made in the 1970s about women, that ignore men's power over them 'if a woman has her own life and destiny to control, she will not be as likely to feel the need to control her husband' (Farrell, 1976).

Marc Feigan Fasteau's *The Male Machine* discussed the emotional impacts of restrictive masculinity, borrowing from Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique*. Feigan Fasteau (1974, p. xiv) wrote that men's 'denial of dependency … and emotions leads to silence and the creation of a male mystique'. Feigan Fasteau is also famous for his egalitarian marriage with Brenda Feigan Fasteau, a feminist lawyer who co-founded the Women's Action Alliance with Gloria Steinem, and with whom he set up a law partnership, representing gender cases such as fathers who sought custody in divorce cases.[1]

[1]A notable case includes *Ackerman* v. *Board of Education* in 1974, in which the Feigan Fasteaus defended Gary Ackerman who sought paternity leave in New York City.

Although there was this early male support to the WLM, it is important to remember that such advocacy was in the minority. The lack of engagement could have been due to animosity towards the movement's perceived threat upon male privileges, a result of apathy, or being unable to identify with women's issues. Nonetheless, there are echoes of festering resentment in regard to women's rights, clearly infused through the manosphere and wider society remaining today.

When Feminism Became the Enemy

By the late 1970s, the MLM had dissolved, with the conservative and moderate wings of men's liberation transforming into an anti-feminist MRM, which Messner (1998) describes as being facilitated by the discourse of sex roles. The progressive wing of men's liberation, however, continued as a pro-feminist movement but focussed on gender relations and power, rejecting sex role language.

The 1980s saw a pop cultural turn in regard to a blurring of gendered representations with the heyday of glam rock, yuppies, and UK musicians David Bowie, Boy George and Freddie Mercury pushing boundaries of what it meant to be male, whilst family dynamics and divorce were increasingly becoming more politicised. During the dissension of the MLM, some men questioned the previous stance on sexism and sought a return to traditional masculine values in a bid to tackle how modern society had emasculated and feminised men (Kimmel, 2017). Anti-feminist MRAs saw an opportunity to manipulate concerns about shifting gender norms and the changes influenced by the sexual and cultural revolutions of the 1960s and 1970s, to garner support from men who felt oppressed by society and who blamed women and their increased rights, for their dissatisfaction (Kimmel, 2017; Schmitz & Kazyack, 2016; Whitehead, 2002).

One of the main concerns for MRAs pre-web in the 1980s or as part of Web 1.0 from the 1990s to 2000s (although such discourses continue today) regarded state-centred issues, such as feminism's perceived attack on fatherhood via the implementation of family law legislation, which MRA's believed, was in favour of women's interests (Gotell & Dutton, 2016; Kimmel, 2017; Maddison, 1999). MRAs sought to dispute, what they saw as bias law reform and policy relating to child custody, access and support (Boyd, 2004; Kimmel, 2017). Furthermore, an abiding rhetoric of MRA groups, which was prolific during this period, is their challenging of feminist studies that evidenced the gendered nature of domestic violence and anti-violence policies aimed at protecting women, with retaliations about discrimination against male victims (Dragiewicz, 2008, 2011). Rather than advocating for survivors of domestic abuse (whether male or female), MRA communities campaigned for the disestablishment of domestic violence services that protect women, which they perceived to be providing women with an unfair social advantage (Dragiewicz, 2008, 2011; Kimmel, 2017; Schmitz & Kazyack, 2016). MRAs were also typically preoccupied with organising and fighting against what they felt were attacks on the family and unfair practices in divorce proceedings, such that those who had earlier alliances with feminism underwent an about turn.

The previous 'feminist hero', Warren Farrell, had taken umbrage against NOW's stance in divorce cases, in declaring their support of providing child custody to the main caregiver, who was usually the mother, and having been through a divorce himself, came to the conclusion that feminists were more interested in power than in equality, a view that was being echoed by many more men. The disillusionment with feminism continued to escalate with the growth of women entering the workforce. Rather than viewing this as a positive, a means of reducing the pressures on men to be the sole earner, it was viewed as a threat to men's position. The dormant economy was overlooked, and instead, blame for less jobs for men and divorced fathers losing access to their children was apportioned to feminism and its gains, impacting upon the continued splintering of the MLM. Farrell's 1988 book *Why Men Are the Way They Are* depicts a world where women, especially female executives, wield immense power. Ideas from this publication, perpetuating the sexual power of women over men, continue to be regurgitated on incel and wider manosphere forums today, informing their perspective on the so-called SMP: Even those women who are less successful have 'enormous sexual leverage over men' and 'can use the power to get external rewards', Farrell wrote, men, on the other hand, have been reduced to 'success objects', judged solely by their status and earning potential (cited in Blake, 2015).

In his later book, commonly regarded as the MRA 'bible', the *Myth of Male Power: Why Men Are the Disposable Sex*, Farrell (1996) makes some bizarrely nebulous claims about male issues. For example, he contemplates whether American males are the new 'n*gger' by comparing men giving up their seats for women to slavery. Furthermore, he stated that women only have themselves to blame for unequal pay, domestic violence occurs both ways and government programmes to assist women only exacerbate inequality. Although there is some acknowledgement that men have some societal advantages, Farrell maintains that women's sexual power negates any such leverage. Bolstering the false rape allegation rhetoric favoured within today's MRA and incel communities, Farell argued that feminism has enabled women to pursue sexual harassment or date rape charges, when they merely feel ill-treated. There are even the seeds of the incel resentment towards women for having the autonomy to refuse them sex, in which Farrell intimates that men experience sexual trauma from women changing their minds about having sex and are at risk of being accused of sexual assault merely from attempting to initiate sex – which is what is expected of them.

Additionally, during the 1980s, a subgroup of MRA had formed driven by the belief that white men in America were in crisis as a result of feminist, and more broadly liberalism, influence destroying traditional American culture. This was a critical turning point not only for the MRM but also in popular backlash sentiment towards feminism, strengthened by media myths propagating the 'dangers' of women's careers and conversely stay-at-home mothers (Faludi, 1991). The contemporary MRM is therefore a reaction to a perceived diminishing social status of cisgender white men and the emergence of feminist and multicultural activism as a mainstream political strength. Its goal is to eradicate feminism as much as it is to improve men's rights (Allan, 2016).

Masculinity and Misandry

A central theme permeating the manosphere is that of misandry, where men perceive themselves to be the real victims of a world that is unfairly in favour of women. Much of this diatribe consists of challenge to issues that overwhelmingly negatively affect women such as domestic abuse and sexual violence and either place men as those most harmed or deny the occurrence of those issues. However, demonstrating (women's) serious hatred of men, to the extent that misandry can be claimed, is often without substance. Even though MRAs would describe feminism as a misandrist movement, there are no swathes of feminist communities dedicated to espousing hatred against men, or indeed encouraging female against male violence, which is what women have to contend with (particularly online today). Nor are men physically dying at the hands of women each week. According to UN data,[2] six women are killed every hour by men globally, most by men in their own family or by their partners. In the United Kingdom, the Femicide Census[3] shows that a man kills a women every three days, a statistic unchanged across the 10 years' worth of data studied. This is not to say that men are without problems, and certainly, the alarming suicide rate of men is testament to this, for example, the suicide rate for men in England and Wales during 2019 was the highest for two decades according to data from the Office of National Statistics (ONS). Men accounted for around three-quarters of suicide deaths registered in 2019 – 4,303 compared with 1,388 women.[4] Nevertheless, there is little evidence to show that misandry is an issue affecting men's lives and which they live in fear of (which many women do). Men who are killed are most likely to have been killed by a man, whilst women who are killed are most likely to have been killed by a man.

Online, the only references to misandry usually only relate to the claims from men themselves rather than from women actively and publicly hating men. However, there is some hostile sounding rhetoric from the WLM that could have been interpreted to be anti-male, for example, 'Watch out. You may meet a real castrating female' (Adams & Briscoe, 1971, p. 55). Furthermore, in an extreme example, the SCUM manifesto, written by Valerie Solanas, took anger towards men and transformed it into a justification for the eradication of men. Solanas and SCUM are regularly referred to within the manosphere and by incels as validation that masculinity is under threat.

Solanas, infamous for shooting the pop artist Andy Warhol in 1968, had wrote and self-published the SCUM manifesto the previous year. Though the attempted murder has sealed Solanas' infamy, with her motives associated with the actualisation of the SCUM manifesto, this has been criticised by Breanne Fahs (2008), who describes this as a reductive formulation that overlooks the inherent contradictions in both the manifesto and Solanas' life. In brief, the SCUM manifesto

[2]http://femicide-watch.org/products/2019-study-global-homicide-gender-related-killings-women-and-girls-unodc

[3]https://www.femicidecensus.org/reports/

[4]https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/birthsdeathsandmarriages/deaths/bulletins/suicidesintheunitedkingdom/2019registrations

states that men are responsible for all of society's problems, are inferior and therefore should not exist. The male is described as an 'incomplete female' a 'walking abortion, aborted at the gene stage' (Solanas, 1968). Within feminist discourse, there is an understandable reluctance to embrace Solanas' work, and certainly her ideas are not easily palatable to a movement that is not a monolith and which has varying divisions of radicalness. Yet, to the manosphere, Solanas represents all of the misandrist fears, and furthermore, SCUM adds credence to the supposed need for men to fight back in order to preserve their very survival. Interestingly, incel ideology and Solanas' manifesto share nihilism in common.

Further support for the anti-feminist MRM came from a woman who had previously been at the heart of second-wave feminism's key gains. In 1971, Erin Pizzey founded the first women's refuge in the United Kingdom. Based in Chiswick, West London, here women could find solace from their abusive partners and start to rebuild their lives. The refuge movement is recognised as one of the pivotal achievements of feminism, in not only providing desperately needed practical support to women but also effecting the language used to describe violence that occurs within the home, changing societal attitudes towards domestic abuse (Lewis, 2020). However, by 1975, Pizzey had actively distanced herself from feminism due to fundamental political differences. She viewed the movement as treating men as the enemy, understanding women's own capacity for violent behaviour, and how both men and women in dysfunctional relationships drive a vicious cycle, leading to what she termed 'addiction to violence'. Pizzey (2009) claimed that this explained why women regularly return to abusive partners, which is in stark contrast to the wealth of research that demonstrates how instead victims are controlled and coerced by abusers, isolated from family and friends and have their self-esteem and confidence diminished (Stark, 2007). Nevertheless, it is clear to see how Pizzey's interpretation of domestic abuse and responsibilisation of women in those situations would be appealing to the MRM, who seek to challenge women's status as victims in heterosexual domestic abuse incidents, particularly where government funding is involved. If couples are both dysfunctional, rather than one party being violent to the other, then the feminist focus on male violence and male perpetrators would be unjustified. However, statistics consistently evidence that this attention is warranted. Self-reported data from the UK 2018 Crime Survey for England and Wales[5] show that nearly twice as many women as men reported being victims of domestic violence that year (7.9% of women, compared with 4.2% of men), although the gender of perpetrators and their relationship to the victim were not recorded. The police found that 75% of victims of domestic violence were female, whilst for specifically sexual offences, 96% were female. Therefore, the extent of male violence and the harms impacted upon women as a result is indeed a perennial problem, though not one acknowledged within the confines of the manosphere. Today, Erin Pizzey is affiliated with MRAs and MGTOW and helps Paul Elam to run a Voice for Men.

[5]https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/crimeandjustice/bulletins/domesticabuseinenglandandwales/yearendingmarch2018

The Manosphere

Attempts to omit gender from discussions about the abuses that women face are part of a broader backlash against feminism (DeKeseredy & Dragiewicz, 2007). The term 'backlash' was coined by Susan Faludi (1991), to describe the 'cultural counterreaction' that occurs in response to undermine and reverse gains from each feminist efforts to advance women's rights (p. 48). MRAs have increasingly began coalescing online spurred on by their offline counterparts who are fixated on dismantling feminist practical and policy gains including efforts to force women's shelters to accommodate men too, on the grounds that it would be otherwise discriminatory (The National Coalition for Men).[6] The efforts by fathers' rights groups to undermine women's shelters and services in the context of the backlash against feminism were explored by Molly Dragiewicz (2011). Rather than campaigning for male victims of domestic violence to have their own desperately needed shelters, MRAs prefer to try and encroach on women's spaces and protections. Other MRA concerns involve seeking the compulsory inclusion of women in the draft and challenges to violence against women legislation. For MRAs online, their activism is entrenched in personal experiences and narratives influenced by sexual rejection and pseudo-scientific interpretations of biological essentialism, rather than an organised political movement, but which still has far-reaching political implications.

MRAs online congregate within the manosphere. The manosphere refers to an online movement of anti-feminist websites focussed primarily on 'men's issues' (Ribeiro et al., 2020; Van Valkenburgh, 2018). The term was popularised by author and pornography marketer Ian Ironwood, who published a book collating blogs and forums about perceived male struggles titled *The Manosphere: A New Hope For Masculinity* (Ging, 2017). The manosphere has no principal authority, comprised of a decentralised network of websites, gaming platforms and chat rooms imbued with misogyny and satire, and a compelling overlap with other violent ideologies, most notably right-wing extremism and white supremacy. The manosphere encompasses a wide range of groups from MRAs and Fathers' Rights Activists (FRAs), to PUAs and to the more extremist MGTOW and incels but is united by the central belief that feminine values, propelled by feminism, dominate society and promote a 'misandrist' ideology that needs to be overthrown. MRAs are driven by anger and want to effect change, namely a return to the traditional values where women are subordinate to men. Women need to be put back in their place and to do so abuse of women, particularly feminists, is encouraged. Despite what its name may imply, MGTOW members weaponise homophobia in order to solidify their heterosexuality in a space that rejects women, and they use online harassment to police the borders of hegemonic and toxic masculinity. The MGTOW movement differs slightly from much of the manosphere as it generally rejects any form of relationship with women,

[6]http://ncfm.org/wp-content/uploads/2009/01/Woods-v-Shewry-published-decision.pdf

although it is noted that some members do have sex with women and are married to women, but the same issues of violence and harassment are present (Jones, Trott, & Wright, 2020). MGTOW in rejecting the demands of what they perceive to be Western geocentricism are influenced by the mythopoetic movement led by poet and author Robert Bly (1990), who suggested that men should return to their ingrained nature by embracing homosocial solidarity.

PUAs view women as mere objects, bodies to be tricked into sex. There is no consideration of women as autonomous human beings worthy of honesty or respect; moreover, women are viewed as simply shallow and motivated by looks and money and thus fair game to be deceived and used for sexual purposes. Pick up artistry is informed by a hegemonic ideal of what it is to be masculine (Connell, 1995; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005), benefitting off the self-help movement, and evident in the lad culture and banter so pervasive in contemporary society, and which had significant impact upon the development of 'ladette' culture in the 1990s/2000s (Levy, 2010). Due to representing the perspectives and experiences of its creators, certain representation and diversity have been overlooked with unforeseen discriminations embedded within technology such that sexism, racism, homophobia and ableism are inherent, making web spaces less accessible to people from marginalised groups. Let us not forget the original purpose of Facebook, which Mark Zuckerberg, after being rejected, decided to develop a tool in order to rate the female students at Harvard University. It was less about the building of an online community (or billion-dollar conglomeration at that point) and more about the old adage of exercising male privilege and reducing women's importance to their aesthetics. This notion of striking back at the female population and viewing women's only value as their appearance is certainly at the core of not just PUA activity but also incel ideology.

Reference is also made to groups such as Tradcons and NoFappers in the manosphere. Tradcon is short for traditional conservative. Persons within this group advocate on behalf of traditional values such as family morality and gendered roles; however, the incel wiki describes this term as a slur used for identity politics and so claims that there are few that would identify as a Tradcon as a result. NoFappers are men seeking to abstain from pornography and masturbation because they believe that this will enable them to preserve testosterone and achieve greater sexual power and enlightenment. There is a crossover with other misogynistic and antisemitic groups, such as the Proud Boys, who before apparently disbanding in May 2021 had a policy of #NoWanks.

Unlike the aforementioned groups residing in the manosphere, the primary focus for FRAs, with Fathers for Justice being the most well known, is actual men's problems rather than espousing vitriol against women, progressiveness and feminism. Fathers for Justice are concerned with paternal rights and ensuring that fathers have access to their children when relationships break down, when Criminal Justice Systems entrenched in what they deem, sexist, conservative ideals ordinarily operate in favour of the mother. In this respect, the continuation of traditional gender roles, the desire and ideal of other groups in the manosphere, marginalises men and devalues their status as parents.

Although misogyny is rooted within it, the manosphere started as a relatively innocuous expression of men's issues, developing into spaces to air grievances about genuine problems such as male victims of domestic or sexual abuse. However, it has since become increasingly more extreme, spawning a network of activists and sites that take Farrell's ideology on an unsettling course. Users argue the prevalence of false allegations of rape and domestic violence, that shelters for abused women are financial hoaxes, and encourage the hatred of women for being independent or sexually liberated. Studies by Horta Ribeiro et al. (2020) and Farrell, Fernandez, Novotny, and Alani (2019) have shown that the new communities that establish themselves are more toxic and misogynist than their predecessors, and that the language used is becoming progressively more sexually explicit, violent, racist and homophobic. In addition, there has been the growth of far right conspiracy theories permeating the perceptions of manosphere communities and intermingling with the anti-feminist diatribes. An early manosphere site, Fathers Manifesto, saw fragments of Farrell's work being used to supplement calls to exile black people from America along with assertions that Catholic priests were sexually abusing children as part of a cabal to spread AIDS[7] (Blake, 2015). This idea of a powerful secret cabal engaging in child sexual abuse endures today in the form of QAnon, an online conspiracy theory originating on 4chan but which spreads to mainstream social media sites that claims Donald Trump is waging a secret war against elite Satan-worshipping paedophiles in the government, business and media establishment. Social media and opinion polls indicate that there are millions of people who believe in QAnon's ludicrous allegations.[8]

Academic literature has highlighted the increased capabilities of the internet for MRAs and incels to publicly disseminate antifeminist discourse (Ging, 2017; Gotell & Dutton, 2016; Lilly, 2016; Marwick & Caplan, 2018; Schmitz & Kazyack, 2016). Incels have been presented as a misogynistic 'fringe' due to their explicit sexism and hatred for women (Tait, 2018); however, the misogyny espoused by incels, normalising violence against women, is not new and is enduring with digital technologies creating novel opportunities for misogyny to advance and be disseminated. In particular, online communities and virtual platforms have provided the means for the collective animosity of incels and other manosphere groups to advance on an unprecedented scale enabling what Banet-Weiser and Miltner (2016, p. 171) refer to as 'networked misogyny' to prosper. Furthermore, search capabilities and algorithmic politics embedded within technology reflect the interests of their designer's, who are primarily straight, white and male (Ging, 2017; Massanari, 2017). Moreover, anonymity and the availability of polarising topics have simplified the process of finding others with related interests and/or belief systems (Perry, 2001). Archaic perspectives about biology and race not only provided contemporary validation online via forums, social media and memes but also propagated offline in mainstream media, politics and academia.

---

[7]https://www.motherjones.com/politics/2015/01/warren-farrell-mens-rights-movement-feminism-misogyny-trolls/

[8]https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/53498434

Comprised of blogs, videos, podcasts and forums espousing anti-feminist rhetoric, the tendrils of the manosphere reach all over the Web from highly popular and publicly accessible sites such as YouTube to the murkiest recesses of the dark web, which is only accessible via encrypted means. However, early traces of the manosphere can be noted online long before this term was adopted. From Usenet news groups and early blog culture in the 1990s and early 2000s, which were primarily constituted of the core demographic populating the internet at that time – white, educated tech-savvy men, to the prevalence of social media with wider reaching demographic representation arising from 2010 onwards. Progressive men's activists have congregated together to tackle real and significant problems such as the neglect of male health, suicide and unequal parenting rights but also propagate hate, resentment and misogyny.

Like its earlier iteration, the online MRM has emerged alongside feminist configurations and mimics their developments. Third- and fourth-wave feminism, enabled by the technological affordances emanating from the Web 2.0 era, centres on grassroots action and digital activism (Blevins, 2018; Schulte, 2011; Zimmerman, 2017), whilst contemporary MRA groups rely on similar tactics to propagate their causes rather than challenging law and public policy (Gotell & Dutton, 2016). Within the manosphere, there is an emphasis on men being the victims of false rape allegations, the denial of the patriarchy and rape culture as a myth espoused by feminists to instil moral panic (Gotell & Dutton, 2016). However, rape culture as a concept to understand the assemblage of vastly 'gendered norms, behaviours, attitudes, beliefs, values, customs, artifacts, symbols, codes, language, and institutions that tolerate, condone or celebrate sexual aggression' (Powell & Sugiura, 2018) is helpful in framing how cisgender heterosexual men experience sexual victimisation, often perpetrated by other men. Furthermore, it informs the meaning of masculinity and what constitutes a 'real man' (see Connell, 1995; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005), which have implications as to understanding the experiences of male victims and responses to them.

Ging (2017) investigated how theories of masculinity operate within the manosphere, and she found that traditional ideas of hegemonic masculinity and power are intersected by the utilisation of 'victimhood'. She argued that social media provides the perfect platform for amplifying the expression of this 'new hybrid' of masculinity; which she calls 'aggrieved manhood'. Indeed, MRAs often utilise language from feminism in order to portray symbolic and systemic harms against men instead (Nicholas & Agius, 2018). Van Valkenburgh's (2018) content analysis of 'Redpill'-related documents showed that the ideology is not just an expression of hegemonic masculinity, but that it also includes scientific discourse and elements of neoliberalism. This is shown in the way that it economises sexuality and treats women like commodities with a quantifiable exchange value, known as 'Sexual Market Value' (SMV). This framework removes intimacy from human relationships, meaning that women no longer threaten the emotional boundaries established by hegemonic masculinity. Bratich and Banet-Weiser (2019) point to the failures of neoliberalism as being the underlying cause for the increase in violence seen within the manosphere. Neoliberalism has failed to give men the self-confidence it promises, instead relying on misogynistic ideas, which has resulted

in reactive violence against women who do not comply with patriarchal gender roles for sexual reproduction. This violence often starts with online harassment and increases in severity. This abuse has been unsurprisingly denounced by MRAs who dismiss the experiences of women and feminists as victims of online violence in forum discussions (Lumsden, 2019). Any online abuse of women and feminists is justified as retaliation for men's victimisation.

In the manosophere, the redpill and bluepill analogy is used to 'awaken men to feminism's misandry and brainwashing' (Ging, 2017, p. 3). Incels have created a third pill, that of the blackpill, which once metaphorically consumed shows the uncontested nature of reality: that the world is ordered against 'low status' men in favour of women and alpha males, it is impossible to evade this systemic oppression, 'genetically inferior' men have, are and will always be socially disadvantaged, whilst women are biologically equipped to desire conventionally attractive and rich male partners.

Male incels are sad, disillusioned individuals, who have been linked with suicide and metal health issues, more so than members of the other communities. Frustration with the lack of sexual success as promised by the PUA community has, in some cases, led men to pursue the fatalistic incel path. Although it is difficult to ascertain exact numbers of men who self-identify as incel and participate in the online community, estimations suggest over 100,000 globally. They have assumed victim status based on what has essentially led to them identifying as what they term being subhuman. They have been dealt the lowest hand in life by not having the looks to adhere to societal standards of desirable aesthetics (at least in their view and associated with being unsuccessful with the women they want to attract) nor the material wealth which could mitigate the unattractiveness (with the notable exception of Elliot Rodger who did come from a wealthy background). Yet, is this victimhood based on real rather than perceived adversity, discrimination or mistreatment and is more to do with expectations and entitlement about how their lives should be in accordance with the promises afforded to being male. Recall, that some incels are not actually celibate but aggrieved that they are unable to engage in relations with the women they perceive to have a high SMV.

Men-Only Spaces (Online)

The manosphere aside, cyberspace has questionably long been situated as a male-possessed and -managed space inhospitable to women, such that initial users of 4chan professed there 'were no girls on the Internet' (Penny, 2013). Whilst this statement is undoubtedly incorrect, as women were involved in both the development and early uptake of the internet (see Wajcman, 2010) though they and their contributions were not necessarily always acknowledged, it is indicative of the perspective that women do not belong and are unwelcome in many online spaces. Indeed, women's mere presence online is often responded to with abuse and aggression, including gender-based hate speech and trolling, as well as many examples of sexual violence and harassment (Banet-Weiser & Miltner, 2016; Henry & Powell, 2015; Jane, 2016; Mantilla, 2013; Megarry, 2014).

Trolling is a tactic favoured by incels; in fact much of the content on incel forums is designed to provoke, shock and invoke an emotive reaction, a core motivation of trolls. Some behaviours of those who initially co-opted the incel name from its original inclusive origins are remarkably similar to those demonstrated by the early trolls in the Usenet days of the internet. The priority in these situations was about building the community and keeping outsiders out, as well as engaging in combative vexatious actions with peers. Some of the earliest instances of trolling involved Usenet members posting disinformation, content that was deliberately untrue and ludicrous so that anyone who responded and appeared to believe it would be automatically outed as noobs (short for newbies) and ridiculed by the wider community. Other early trolls were referred to as 'net. weenies', essentially these people said whatever they liked and insulted whoever they wanted to – they were unashamedly an asshole for the sake of being an asshole. As Whitney Phillips (2015) author of 'This is why we can't have nice things: mapping the relationship between online trolling and mainstream culture' noted in a Daily Dot article[9] 'trolling was something that one actively chose to do. More importantly, a troll was something one chose to be'. Trolls demonstrate cognitive but not affective empathy (March, 2019); this means that they can predict and recognise the emotional suffering of their victims yet do not actually care or feel guilty about the pain they cause; hence, they are master manipulators of both cyber settings and their victim's emotions.

Initially, the incel community on Reddit was about performing for your peers – who had the worst tales about rejection and was heavily influenced by internet culture, particularly that of trolling, where insults were freely traded. Arguably, this was not for outside consumption, though this does not give free reign to discriminatory language of course. Much like the mindset of spaces not being for women, threads were viewed as a place for men to vent to other like-minded men, without having to worry about offending women. The victim-blaming narrative of warning women and others to stay away to avoid being outraged was prevalent. Much of this culture and mindset still remains, and members continue to post materials designed to garner attention; however, the content has also become more extreme, and the contempt, not just for women but each other, has expanded. The popularity and growth of anonymous sites such as 4chan and 8chan alongside this advancement of more extreme and offensive incel posts is not a coincidence. Although incels frequent different platforms, some specifically dedicated to incel issues alongside generic social media sites, the chan rhetoric, though being more prolific on its own dedicated platforms, has influence elsewhere, especially on the groups whose interests converge with it. Chan is renowned for a culture of abuse, condoned depending on the intention of the abuser – if they don't believe in what they are saying that it's ok. Essentially any topic is fair game as long as it is intended to be humorous – for the lulz. The problem is that trolling as a term has been conflated and excused when it encompasses a broad range of harmful behaviours. As Zoe Quinn, who was the original

[9]https://www.dailydot.com/unclick/phillips-brief-history-of-trolls/

target during Gamergate,[10] astutely states on the site Crash Override (which was created to support victims of online harassment):

> Trolling is an activity as old as the internet itself, though the definition has been warped to apply to everything from someone just being a jackass for laughs – starting an argument with an insincere, asinine, or ridiculous statement to see who will take the bait – to outright hate speech and serious threats.

The deeply misogynistic content posted by incels, regardless of whether it can or should be accessed by others, is a form of online gendered hate. Although there are few instances of posts directed at specific individuals, and even where women (often those in the public eye – which does not provide an automatic licence to disparage them though) are explicitly named, comments are generally made about them rather than to them. Nevertheless, this does not diminish the harms being perpetuated, not just to the individual concerned, but these and other misogynistic posts also impact all women. They are normalising men's violence against women as well as sending a message to women, about how they are hated, how they are right to fear men and how they should not speak or act in ways which challenge the dominant power structures and hierarchies (even if incels themselves do not acknowledge themselves as belonging to those dominant structures). This reflects the idea from hate crime theory that hate crimes are not just about supressing individuals but about controlling the wider community (Chakraborti & Garland, 2015; Perry, 2001).

Why Young White Western Cisgender Men?

There is a common presumption that the incel community is largely white or white presenting. This has been informed, in part, by the several self-described incels who have committed violent acts. This theory was not upended by the broader ethnographic exploration of incel online spaces I undertook, as the majority of YouTube channels, and self-descriptions on forums supported the contention that the majority of incels are white or white presenting and based

[10]Massanari (2015) highlights that the scandal began with independent game developer Zoe Quinn who created a game called 'Depression Quest', which reflected what it was like to have clinical depression and the sole purpose of the game was that you can never truly win, and there is no real way out. Zoe's boyfriend at the time Eron Gjoni accused her of having an affair with a game journalist in order to receive a favourable review. The alleged affairs exposure on 4chan gave rise to the notion that there was a politically incorrect feminist conspiracy surrounding game culture. This in turn led to Zoe being subjected to a process of doxing, in which her social media accounts were hacked and her personal information leaked online, resulting in her having to move home. The same occurred to other women who showed their support for Zoe and challenged the abuse and harassment.

in (North) America and Europe. A 2020 poll on the incel.co site, however, adds nuance to the issue of incels and race, as the results indicate that roughly 45% of its users are from non-white ethnicities. Although the majority (55%) of respondents identify as white or Caucasian, the remaining 45% are equally divided among a range of ethnic and racial groups, including Black, Latino, Asian, Indian, Middle Eastern or ticked the 'other/not sure' option.

Furthermore, according to the incels.co poll, incels are not exclusive to any one country or continent, though Europe and North America do have the greatest numbers of respondents stating they are based from those areas (43% and 38%, respectively). Respondents also hailed from Central and South America, Asia, Oceania and Africa, with representation from every continent aside from Antarctica. Therefore, inceldom has comprehensive international participation.

It is debatable, however, as to whether this site is fully representative of incels and incel culture. Certainly, there are many accounts that are referred to as 'bluepillers', for example, indicating that these are not authentic incels, but it does have a significant number of users that continues to grow and, in terms of an incel community, has the greatest collective online presence. Furthermore, based off the fact that many incels reuse the same username/pseudonym across different platforms, it can be seen that many of the incel.co users are active elsewhere and so this site is not separate or distinct to other incel activity. In addition, a note of caution should be applied when exploring the more prominent incel sites and accounts, which do tend to involve the stereotypical younger white men. This is not necessarily just about incels but also about societal reactions and acknowledgement elevating those who ordinarily have greater visibility to the forefront. Therefore, though there appear to be more vocal young white male incels, we should not overlook the presence of incels of different ethnicities who may not be as publicly active. Jaki et al.'s (2019) analysis of incels.co revealed a racially diverse membership, for example.

This inclusion of more racially diverse people does not mean that incel spaces are exempt from white supremacy and racism though. There is a racial hierarchy positioning whiteness as the ideal, whilst concurrently claiming that white masculinity is under threat. Certainly, there are many discussions centred on the just be white (JBW) theory, whereby non-whiteness is viewed as yet another affliction affecting one's ability to be considered attractive. This was highlighted to me by Tom in the interviews:

> Incels in general do see white men to an extent as genetically superior, because they have a better success in dating and social life compared to non-white men. Rich attractive white men are seen as socially more desirable, and in a jealous/envious way that incels don't have what attractive rich men do.
>
> There is also a thing called Just be White[11] where non-white incels believe the idea that being a white man is considered more attractive

[11]See the subreddit r/JustBeWhite

> (especially among non-white women) because of their race. This also highlights sexual racisms where non-white men face a lot of disadvantages in dating and society because of their race and racial prejudice/stereotypes. (Tom)

As such there is no guarantee that accounts of incels claiming to be white actually are white and are simply masking their true ethnic background to fit in or be more accepted. However, as these forums are sites for people to be as harsh on themselves as possible, assuming more positive characteristics defeats the purpose of engagement somewhat. Alternatively, this could suggest something about incel.co being more appealing to people of different ethnicities.

Perhaps, individuals struggling with issues of ethnic identity have found their way to these conversations. It is also recognised that incels who are white but from different countries do not appreciate being homogenised under a white umbrella, and that there are nuances relating to language and culture impacting on their inceldom. For example, Alex emphasised that incels are an international phenomenon and stated that whilst the redpill and the blackpill are usually two separate ideologies, particularly in the United States; within the Italian incel community, the terms are almost interchangeable. However, he also maintained that in accordance with the majority of incels, Italian incels are blackpilled rather than redpilled, which is ironic as they refer to themselves as 'redpillati' and their primary Facebook page was called 'Il Redpillatore'. Alex explained that the incel community in Italy did not start with this group nor on Facebook even but on a forum created in 2008 called 'Il Forum Dei Brutti' ('the forum of the ugly ones') and, referring to a poll in 2019 on the incels.co site, highlighted how many members are from Europe[12] (approximately 40%).

The majority of the interview participants further upheld the presumption that all incels are white men; however, this was challenged by Ian, although in terms of age he supported the notion that incels are predominantly younger men:

> Not all incels are same. There are incels of all races. Most of them are socially inept, isolated, lonely and lost young men with issues in a world which doesn't care about them and they want some direction in life. (Ian)

It is significant that Ian describes incels as having been rejected by society, as such they are susceptible to an ideology such as the blackpill, which provides them with appealing explanations for this supposed exclusion and lack of sympathy.

[12]The survey thread is no longer available online.

Whilst there is some crossover between incels and other manosphere groups, interview participants were keen to distance themselves from different men's rights communities and to highlight the distinctions within their ideologies.

> Incels are not the same as MGTOW and TRP, so when you see mainstream media lumping all of the manosphere together, they're misinforming. (Ian)

The manosphere also has support from groups comprised of women. Trad-wives, short for traditional wives, are women who support and practice traditional domestic values, with a mutual nostalgic yearning to return to simpler times, when men and women knew their places – men as the breadwinners and women as the homemakers, and a rejection of feminism. There is overlap with Tradcons, as well as the far right, as they and trad-wives share an anti-immigration, anti-islam and anti-multiculturalism political stance, which they believe have contributed to contemporary societal problems. Trad-wives first emerged online, predominantly from the Redpill Woman subreddit, this being an offshoot from the manosphere. On this thread, women are taught that their single most important purpose is to please men, which sounds like the ultimate achievement for incels. Moreover, submission and obedience to husbands are emphasised. Trad-wives are increasingly gaining a greater online presence, with videos titled, for example, 'The War on Men', in which the mainstream media, education system, the entertainment industry and naturally feminism are credited with creating the 'hostile narrative' surrounding [straight white] men. Such videos rely on the same scaremongering as other MRA groups, namely fathers losing access to their children, the denial of women as experiencing the majority of domestic abuse at the hands of male perpetrators, workplace quotas and attacks on masculinity. Intertwined amongst the hyperbole are real men's issues, but the agenda to promote progression as the enemy is all consuming, and thus, there is little presented to resolve those problems other than turning one's back on equality. Joining the MRM is often presented as a solution, though sometimes the trad-wife declares a disclaimer of sorts by stating that she is not that familiar with the operation of the movement, coming from someone who also supposedly encourages critical thinking and engagement with verified sources, then this is a contradictory turn. Interestingly, trad-wives also go to great lengths to highlight that though men are the ones who suffering, they are not victims, such that their role as protector is untarnished.

The influence and support of trad-wives upon the growth of the manosphere and ultimately the increased threat against women and society should not be overlooked as women have long played a significant role in extremist movements, if not as key risks as potential allies (Bloom, 2011; Brown, 2013; Parashar, 2011; Pearson, 2020). Incels, whilst aggrieved at sexual liberation enabling women to choose who they have sex with, differ from trad-wives who view chastity and marriage as a solution to sexism. Nonetheless, where incels and trad-wives complement each other is their resentment and rejection of contemporary sexuality and gender relations. Both agree that men are oppressed

by their gender, and this oppression is the outcome of pressures and constraints placed on men by society (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005) leading to a crisis of masculinity.

Crisis of Masculinity

There are claims that the West has lost faith in masculinity and the divinity of masculinity to which men could aspire to, has been denigrated, impacted by high levels of unemployment, low educational achievement, a deterioration of traditional working-class professions and the growth in women's equality, which have launched masculinity into a state of crisis (Bourgois, 1996; Collier, 1998). I was alerted to a study, about the decline of happiness in Americans[13] by Ben, who claimed that men are actually the unhappiest they've ever been and argued that navigating masculinities has little to do with it:

> A large number of young men feel they are left alone and isolated. They feel that their importance in society is being undermined and they're not given enough importance and young men's issues are considered not important or invalid, especially with the rise of feminism. (Ben)

R. W. Connell's (1987) *Theory of Hegemonic Masculinity* has been applied to explain behaviours of incels and other misogynistic groups within the manosphere (Bratich & Banet-Weiser, 2019; Ging, 2017; Menzie, 2020; Vito, Admire, & Hughes, 2018; Witt, 2020). Hegemonic masculinity refers to men's power being systematically institutionalised, manifesting in destructive social and behavioural expectations of men that fulfil the purpose of maintaining dominance over women (Connell, 1987). Connell (1987, p. 185) notes that the public face of hegemonic masculinity is not automatically what powerful men are, but what preserves and enables their power and what many men are encouraged to aspire to. In writing about hegemonic masculinity, Connell aimed to expand upon patriarchy theory and highlight the systemic nature of men's domination not only over women but over other men too, what she termed subordinate masculinities. As such hegemonic masculinities provide a way to understand hierarchies between men and not just genders. This is particularly useful when applied to the thinking underpinning the incel hierarchy – from the alpha Chads down to the zeta incels themselves. Connell refined the concept of hegemonic masculinity with Messerschmidt in 2005 (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005), suggesting that masculinity is not fixed nor embodied in the physical body or personality traits; thus, it should not be considered as an essence of gender, rather it is a set of practices and accomplishments. Connell and Messerschmidt (2005, p. 848) also stated that 'gender is always relational'; thus, femininity is instrumental in shaping masculinities. Favourable masculine

[13]https://www.google.com/amp/s/www.fatherly.com/health-science/why-am-i-unhappy-because-american-men-are-sad/amp/

traits include competitiveness, achievement, self-confidence, emotional control, strength, aggressiveness and sometimes violence. Homosexuality and perceived 'feminine' traits are considered less valuable or desired attributes in Western society (Kachel, Steffens, & Niedlich, 2016).

Spaces within the 'manosphere' promote unhealthy conceptions of masculinity centring around a collective sense that modern masculinity is in 'crisis'. No clearer is this assertion found than in the analysis of incel discourse involving negotiations and conceptions of masculinity, for example, the incel conception of the Chad hegemonic masculine standard and their 'beta' positioning in relation to 'Chad'. The term 'toxic masculinity' has increasingly been popularised within public discourse, highlighting the problems of a hegemonic gender structure that enables male violence and misogyny (McCann, 2020). First appearing in the 1990s, toxic masculinity referred to destructive behaviours embraced by men when attempting to achieve aspects of successful manhood (Karner, 1996). Kupers (2005, p. 714) defines toxic masculinity as '… the constellation of socially regressive male traits that serve to foster domination, the devaluation of women, homophobia, and wanton violence'. It is often applied in a manner echoing the motivation of hegemonic masculinity, to understand how some men are also harmed by rigid gender norms. However, Waling (2019) claims that toxic masculinity is a misinterpretation of Connell's work as it reduces the hierarchical element of the theory. Connell's original hierarchy enables us to appreciate different facets of masculinity that sit unevenly with each other – McCann (2020) presents the example of risk-taking behaviours of non-heterosexual men. Whilst toxic masculinity only offers an explanation as to the risk-taking behaviour without considering the role that the disfavoured sexual orientation plays, hegemonic masculinity provides a more nuanced interpretation that considers how the impact of a subordinate masculinity might have shaped the risk-taking behaviour. Applying an intersectional lens as per Crenshaw (1990) allows us to appreciate how sexuality, race and/or class may have influenced and informed such toxic behaviours. As Launius and Hassel (2018) assert, an intersectional approach is vital to understanding how masculinities are created in relation to different aspects and expectations of identity.

Some academics have criticised the term toxic masculinity for presenting the notion that there is a contrasting healthy masculinity which men should strive to. Waling (2019) claims that labelling certain masculinities as toxic and others as healthy is unhelpful and reinforces a binary-gendered framework. Theorisations of masculinity as toxic often position men as victims rather than being active in retaining gendered relations, provide vague explanations of healthy masculinity, overlook the duality of traits in being positive in certain contexts and damaging in others and suggest new forms of masculinity that appropriate femininity, whilst discounting femininity at the same time (Waling, 2019). Fundamentally, Waling argues that responses to toxic masculinity that propagate a healthier masculinity situate masculinity as separate from femininity and fail to include feminine qualities into an understanding of masculinity.

The challenges to toxic masculinity, particularly from incels, and more broadly MRAs, include the retort that toxic femininity also exists, suggesting that women

have pernicious behaviour too. The motivation behind this rebuttal is to neutralise any gendered explanations of power and present anti-feminist sentiment. An example of this is from Jeff Minick who wrote about toxic femininity as 'toxic feminism' on the conservative website *Intellectual Takeout*[14] – 'Based on their sex, women fired from a job or refused promotion can claim "victimhood" status, while a man who did the same would be laughed from the room'.

The incel and MRA forums and websites are replete with the topic of how women act in toxic ways, are bitchy, vengeful and manipulative. What incels and MRAs misinterpret, when they deploy the term toxic femininity, is that within feminist spheres, this refers to the gender expectations that keep women subservient, quiet and submissive to men's domination and aggression. Snider (2018) discusses how women internalise patriarchal ideals of femininity and are constrained to think and behave in ways conforming to those notions. The very status that incels and MRAs want women to maintain, rather than what they are suggesting through their application of the term, as to the supposed harms that women are inflicting upon men. Obviously, it would be erroneous to claim that no woman has ever hurt a man, emotionally or physically, but alleging that there is an equal counterpart to damaging male behaviours applicable to women overlooks differing systemic gender roles and the impacts from them. Rather than using this term, McCann (2020) recommends considering what might be noxious about certain aspects of femininity and presents the concept of 'rigid femininities' to explain the structures that reinforce the control of a toxic gender power system.

Despite criticisms for being used to castigate men and immediately putting them on the defensive, instead of acknowledging that the problem is structural; toxic masculinity does not mean that all men are lethal, rather there are certain forms of masculinity which are harmful, especially to women, non-binary and transgender people, the men who do not adhere to the patriarchal ideals (white, heterosexual, successful with women, financially wealthy) and even the men who do fit those standards and comply with the behavioural expectations. It is conceivable, however, that men who are feeling disempowered and that their masculinity is under threat could turn to acts of violence to try and reclaim power and enhance self-esteem (Messerschmidt, 1994; Nayak, 2006).

Conclusions

Initially, the mutual damage impacting women and men, from patriarchal-gendered expectations – women's importance is in their looks, whilst men's in their financial success – was recognised by both the women's and men's liberation groups, and there was an alliance in dismantling these structures. The disintegration of the MRM has led to feminism becoming the enemy for current MRAs within the manosphere and beyond and the weaponisation of women's appearances. According to contemporary men's rights groups, women do not

[14]https://www.intellectualtakeout.org/article/why-feminists-hate-toxic-femininity/

experience sexism, because their looks provide them with power which they can use to manipulate men. Women are unable to experience discrimination from men, about something which places them in a dominant position over men. Men, however, are still expected to earn the money but are also acknowledged to be more successful if they are lucky enough to be born attractive. These ideas, however, did not originate with the MRAs of today; these beliefs were already inherent within the early movement and espoused by influential figures, for example, Warren Farrell (1974, p. 48) stated 'A woman becomes a sex object as a man becomes a success object'. Moreover, key elements of incel philosophy – the de-politicising of gender, the notion that manhood needs to be earned or achieved and the belief that feminism created the myth of male privilege – align with those of the men's liberationists and the MRM.

Some of the issues discussed within the manosphere are facts, for example, the limiting nature of masculine gender roles and constraining expectations for the performance of Western masculinity; however, much is based on more emotive responses. This is not to dismiss men's feelings, feelings are real, and I am not questioning or challenging what men are feeling, but despite the strength of feelings, they may not be *true* and are based on individual perceptions rather than facts (Kimmel, 2017). For example, the feeling that men are marginalised from society, and are victims of the 'natural social order', initiated by second-wave feminism and the sexual revolution of the 1960s, which is the essence of incel.

Chapter 3

Join the Incel Rebellion

> Private (Recruit) Minassian Infantry 00010, wishing to speak to Sgt 4chan please. C23249161. The Incel Rebellion has already begun! We will overthrow all the Chads and Stacys! All hail the Supreme Gentleman Elliot Rodger! (Alek Minassian)

Incel or incel-related perpetrators such as Alek Minassian have become the public faces of the community. Their atrocities and the resulting media responses have provided them with notoriety and attention and contributed to raising the profile of incels beyond being a mere online subcultural group. Minassian's claim of an incel rebellion, actualising the idea that aggrieved men are rising up against their perceived oppressors in violent ways, is extremely unsettling and such a threat absolutely warrants counterterrorism attention. This notion of a supposed incel insurgency, however, did not originate with Minassian and continues within discussions in the networks today, but what exactly is this incel rebellion and is there active recruitment to the incel cause and community? Addressing these questions, this chapter focusses on the defining attributes of incels, what makes individuals self-identify as incel and motivations for joining incel communities. The themes in incel language and ideology, as well as the discourse of the wider manosphere, are also considered. Drawing on empirical research data, this chapter provides insight into how and why young men become incels and whether they are being drawn and effectively radicalised into a hate-fuelled ideology online. In addition, this chapter considers the main mechanisms and platforms that are being used, and the symbiotic nature of the relationship between men's activist groups and popular culture will be demonstrated. Messages and symbolism in mainstream media are appropriated by such online communities to promote their beliefs, whilst their language is increasingly infiltrating common vocabulary, reinforcing misogynistic, homophobic, ableist and racist rhetoric.

The Incel Rebellion: The Rise of the Manosphere and the Virtual War Against Women, 37–67
Copyright © Lisa Sugiura 2021 Published by Emerald Publishing Limited.

This work is published under the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY 4.0) licence. Anyone may reproduce, distribute, translate and create derivative works of this work (for both commercial and non-commercial purposes), subject to full attribution to the original publication and authors. The full terms of this licence may be seen at http://creativecommons.org/licences/by/4.0/legalcode

All rights of reproduction in any form reserved
doi:10.1108/978-1-83982-254-420211005

Deconstructing Incel

Moderators of incel.co, one of the largest incel forums, released the results of a community poll in 2020, which had 665 respondents. The findings, though self-reported and unscientific, provide insight into the community and incel mindset. Predictably, the average incel, according to this poll, is a man, in his mid-20s, of average height, white and European or North American. He has never had a sexual relationship or kissed a woman. He is deeply unhappy, potentially depressed and has considered having (but has never had) aesthetic surgery. He believes his physical appearance is the most significant factor in this lack of romantic and sexual success, followed by his lack of social skills.

Incels are generally perceived to be young white men. The 10 interview participants were all young (between 18 and 35) white men, based in Europe, North America or Central America, aside from one who identified as black, and another who identified as Asian. The incel.co poll largely confirmed that profile too: 82% of respondents said they were between the ages of 18 and 30. The largest percentage (36%) was between the ages of 18 and 21. The second largest segment (30%) said they were between 22 and 25, followed by 18% aged 26–30. Most alarmingly, nearly 8% said they were younger than 17.

When asked to describe in their own words, what an incel is, there was a consensus amongst interview participants that there is a culture of blame against women and wider society, within the community. Along with this, men spoke self disparagingly, in terms that were derogatory, melancholic and despondent about the community they are part of or used to align themselves with:

> An incel is a guy who is frustrated at his lack of success in dating, struggles with attracting women and subsequently develops a very bitter attitude towards society, women, attractive guys, pretty much everything else. Incels believe they themselves are sub-human. (Mike)

> An incel is a guy/man who is involuntarily celibate. This means that he doesn't have sex and/or romantic relationships not for his own choice, but due to women's choice. (Ben)

This construction of choice is a reoccurring theme throughout the incel community, specifically that women having autonomy to decide who they wish to enter into sexual or romantic relationships with, be they men, other women or individuals who identify as non-gender binary, has impacted upon men's power to select partners of their choosing.

The incel interpretation of celibacy was explained by Ben, who excluded sex workers as authentic sexual partners and references sexual success rate as an important factor:

> Despite celibate meaning that one never had sex, there are many guys on incel forums/sites (either American and European) that even if they're not virgin they still identify as incels because even if they had sex, their success rate with women (non-sex workers)

> is low (too many efforts and too little reward) because they have a low LMS (looks, money, status). (Ben)

This notion that sex with sex workers does not constitute valid sexual experience was supported by Tom to a degree, but this was more in relation to the lack of an emotional connection rather than the sexual intercourse itself. Tom did recognise that he was not a virgin after having sex with a sex worker, despite including a qualifier to this:

> I was an incel until I lost my virginity at 2017 but I lost it to a prostitute, however I did date somebody for a week, but it wasn't a good relationship and I initiated the break up. Then in recent years I visited a few escorts. Sex is easy to get as long as you have money, but I never experienced true love or intimacy or had a long term relationship with someone I truly enjoy. (Tom)

Tom, who referred to himself as a past incel, though he still interacted on the Reddit incel forums, also had a broader interpretation as to what, and indeed who, could be perceived as an incel, not just referring to men in his explanation:

> An incel is a person mostly blames the opposite gender for their lack of sexual activities. They all agree on their opinion that the opposite gender are bad and instead of looking why, they decide to group together … this causes them to spread hatred in hopes of bringing other people into the community who had a bad experience with a woman/man and feed them their 'knowings'. (Tom)

Yet, for Tom, as with the majority of the incel community, the default positions are heterosexual relationships and a binary description of gender. Nevertheless, he also recognised that the majority of incels are male:

> It is mostly men, and they tend to have really bad attitude, self-awareness and many negative personalities. They think that the world owes them sex, so they don't try and improve themselves much in order to get a mate. (Tom)

Tom has attempted to place some distance between himself and the incel mindset, in his acknowledgement of male entitlement (to women's bodies) and the inability to look inward for self-improvement.

Self-identifying as Incel

Being an incel is undoubtably a lonely existence, with seemingly little advantage aside from the community interaction and licence to be aggrieved with others for one's unhappiness. However, Tom suggested that isolation arising from being an incel can actually be a positive outcome as there are less opportunities to be bullied or ridiculed and so the adoption of the incel identity in this respect could be

viewed as a form of self-protection but still acknowledged that, for the most part, being an incel is a negative experience:

> The benefit I see [of being an incel] is dealing with less conflicts because you don't really socialize much, but everything else about being an incel is negative. You deal with loneliness, depression, you feel like you have no place in life, lack of relationships with opposite gender, getting made fun of (whether it's being skinny, fat weird etc.) and more. (Tom)

Incels overwhelmingly appear to be educated, often to degree level, this is information often volunteered on forums and through my direct interactions with them. It shows that they are keen to demonstrate intellectual ability, something which is undeniably positive and a major achievement, in opposition to the failure they otherwise present themselves as. But for incels, being smart cannot detract from being unattractive, looks will always trump intelligence. Therefore, such presentations of being intelligent are less to do with providing alternative favourable characteristics and potentially more to do with validating their world view and informing the studies they select to do so. There is a sense of righteous knowledge, bolstered by the redpill and blackpill philosophies, of having novel wisdom, yet this benefits from the support of conventional education. As Ben stated 'learning the blackpill made me feel edgy and cool because it was like I could see things in a way normies don't'.

Some incels resent media portrayals of incels that stereotype them as NEETS – young people who are no longer in the education system or in employment, the archetypal isolated internet user languishing in their bedroom or parent's basement:

> I think that media tend to depict the worst side of incels and they do that intentionally because bad gossip profits more than good gossip. For example they tend to depict incel as NEETS but only a small part of incel members is NEET. (Alex)

Nevertheless, there is evidence to suggest that many incels have advanced computer skills and/or interests in this field, are programmers or coders and there is a crossover with gaming communities. By virtue of spending prolonged periods of time online, on certain social media and gaming platforms, individuals are more likely to encounter incels and the prevailing philosophies, which as discussed previously intersect through other internet communities. For example, Jason discussed how as a teenager he was an incel aligning with the aforementioned stereotype:

> At age 16–17 I would identify myself as an incel because I was very shut in and didn't really talk to many women at all. I was very out of shape and only played video games with not much social life. (Jason)

Many of the interview participants stated that the first time they encountered the term incel was on Reddit, which then piqued their curiosity to learn more resulting in googling the term and being exposed to the wider communities within the manosphere and the redpill and blackpill ideologies.

For Carl, resonating with the blackpill and the redpill led him to continue engaging with incels and the wider manosphere online, which resulted in his indoctrination:

> I heard about incels online first, although I knew more about blackpill and TRP before that. I related with some of their issues, then I went further down and before I knew it the manosphere's toxic ideas were deep ingrained in my mind. It's pretty easy to get exposed to this online. (Carl)

Ben also spoke about the lure of the manosphere and how he became converted to the blackpill, after his ex-girlfriend cheated on him:

> After my ex-girlfriend cheated on me with a hotter guy. I realized that women monkey branch to other men, will never be loyal and will go on the cock-carousel. (Ben)

According to the Urban Dictionary, monkey branching is when a girl already has a boyfriend but gives her number to other guys and flirts as if she was single. Essentially, she is branching off from her boyfriend and establishing backups. The cock-carousel is a frequently used pejorative term to describe women's inability to be monogamous.

Being rejected as well as cheated upon led to Pete uncovering the blackpill and becoming an incel:

> What made me identify as an incel was when I realized how much I struggled with dating and even forming friends with girls. I pretty much never had any female friends. When I finally got a girlfriend, she was manipulative and cheated on me, which made me distrustful of young women. I've also always been socially shy and reserved, which may have had an impact. When I discovered the blackpill I could relate to a lot what it said and hence I knew I was an incel. (Pete)

The blackpill has also impacted upon Mike and how he views women:

> The blackpill is logic to me and I have embraced it. Reading blackpill topics made me start to hate women. I have learnt about women's nature by reading surveys, statistics and papers, and the more I hate women. (Mike)

Alex, though, is somewhat of an anomaly in the incel community, as he considers himself good-looking; however, what drew his attention to the blackpill was when he began researching about alopecia and balding and discovered incel forums discussing these topics. Being bald is one of the misfortunes that incels claim impacts upon one's chances of sexual success and so for someone seeking possible cures/remedies for balding, being presented with this fatalistic interpretation can be self-destructive:

> I need to tell that before finding these forums I didn't hate women and the whole sex issue wasn't a concern of mine. Also, I wasn't interested in feminist issues. (Alex)

However, for Alex, the blackpill provided insight that enabled him to feel superior to his 'bluepilled' friends, who were equally as unsuccessful with girls as he was, despite them confirming to society's expectations:

> The blackpill made me see women in a completely new way. Society teaches you that women are beautiful, pure, innocent, and must be protected. It tells you that women are better than men because women don't hate, don't discriminate. It tells you that women aren't as superficial as men when it comes to dating. The blackpill destroyed all the beliefs imprinted by society in my mind. I couldn't see women in the same way I did before. Society gives women a beautiful veil of pureness but the blackpill tore that veil. I also hated women's hypocrisy in negating the fact that looks matter a lot and that often personality isn't enough when you are ugly. (Alex)

Alex refers to the impossible standards that women are expected to live up to, highlighting the problems with gendered stereotypes and expectations. The false narrative of the chaste perfect woman feeds into the dichotomy of women as either Madonnas or whores rather than nuanced human beings. Originating with Sigmund Freud's work, women are perceived as good, chaste and pure Madonnas or bad, promiscuous and seductive whores (Pomeroy, 1975). Freud (1905, 1912) theorised that the Madonna/whore complex inhibited heterosexual men's ability to view women as having both tender and sensual aspects to their sexuality. Men who suffer from this complex, therefore, can only become aroused when they degrade a female partner, and reduce her to a sex object, as respecting her would not equate with desiring her. The Madonna/whore dichotomy continues to resonate in contemporary society (Bareket, Kahalon, Shnabel, & Glick, 2018), in film (Paul, 2013), television (Tropp, 2006) and is particularly prevalent in the West (Faludi, 2009).

Although many incels discuss the problems they have conversing with others and, in particular, face-to-face interactions, others reject the representation of incels as being socially awkward, reframing the issue to focus on women and their

discriminatory behaviours when it comes to sexual partners, as what the media should ideally be focussing on:

> I don't like that the media tends to describe incels as socially inept guys either explicitly or implicitly. For sure there are a lot of incels that haven't developed social skills or even lost then because of depression due to their condition, but it's unfair that despite all the studies and statistics about women being more selective than men in choosing a partner, young women having more sex than men, they put all the blame on men and never on women. (Alex)

It is also thought-provoking that Alex talks about being incel in terms of a medical affliction, a 'condition' which causes depression, hinders the advancement of social skills or even removes social abilities. This aligns with the blackpill perception that being incel is inescapable, that people are just naturally incel due to their aesthetics, and not even wealth or class can elevate them from this existence. Incel as a condition is worth exploring in regard to the association with incels and neurodiversity, which is receiving more attention, especially in light of Alek Minassian's attempted defence, but is an area that is lacking in academic research. Minassian's lawyers claimed that his being autistic meant that he was unable to appreciate the wrongness of his actions in driving into and killing pedestrians. This assertion had significant implications not only for those on the autistic spectrum but for how others perceive such individuals, who are already stigmatised. According to Masataka (2018, p. 1):

> neurodiversity refers to the notion that seemingly 'impaired' cognitive as well as emotional features characteristic of developmental disorders such as (ASD) fall into normal human behavioural variations that should enjoy some selective advantages.

The American Psychiatric Association (2013)[1] regards autism as a spectrum of developmental disorders characterised by social communicative difficulties and restricted behaviour and interests. Autism, in particular, has risen in prevalence, and alongside a growing awareness, the disorder is developing what Jurecic (2007, p. 422) describes as an 'increasingly powerful cultural resonance'. This involves the term autism being used to casually insult others, that is, 'don't be autistic!' implying apprehension and misunderstanding towards neurological difference. Further, this distorted perception of what it means to have autism takes the form of a metaphor for the 'postmodern self, disengaged from the world and from others' (Jurecic, 2007, p. 422), which could also describe the stereotypical incel. The indication is that many incels are neurodiverse, whether this has been officially diagnosed or self-diagnosed, with members self-disclosing this in forum discussions:

> Alek Minassian was radicalised by the incel boards and the incel subreddit /r/incels before it got banned. I don't condone his or

[1]https://www.psychiatry.org/patients-families/autism/what-is-autism-spectrum-disorder

> Elliot Rodger's actions. In one aspect I feel sorry for them because they both have autism, which hinders their social ability to attract women. Many men on the autism spectrum struggle to find a girlfriend, so I do feel sorry for them. (Alex)

This link with neurodiversity was also acknowledged in the interviews with Carl referring to 'mentalcels', incels who state that they are unable to attract girls due to being autistic. This adds an almost contradictory dimension to the emphasis on looks, whereby it is noted that attractiveness in itself is not enough to gain a partner, as personality and behaviour are also important factors. Hence, those who are neurodiverse, who might struggle in social interactions, could view themselves as not having the right temperament or skills, which would therefore affect their chances of being successful romantically and sexually. This interpretation could also be based off others responding negatively to them. According to the blackpill, women are shallow and superficial and only interested in men's looks, wealth and status, so this concern about character from mentalcels undermines this depiction.

Alek Minassian, who killed 10 and injured 16 others when he drove a van into pedestrians in Toronto, in his trial for murder, denied that he was criminally responsible because he was not mentally capable of understanding the wrongness of his actions due to having autism spectrum disorder (ASD).[2] Minassian's defence lawyer had argued that his client's disorder had left him unable to develop empathy; therefore, he was unaware of how horrific his actions were to his victims, his family and the community. This prompted outrage from autism advocacy groups, concerned about the potential of further stigmatisation of those with this disorder in being labelled criminals. Were this defence upheld, it would have had significant repercussions on the Canadian criminal justice in absolving those with ASD from being able to undertake rational decisions and appreciate the wrongness of their actions. However, on 3 March 2021, Alek Minassian was held criminally responsible and found guilty of 10 counts of first-degree murder and 16 counts of attempted murder.[3] Rendering her decision, Justice Anne Molloy said that his attack was

> the act of a reasoning mind … he freely chose the option that was morally wrong, knowing what the consequences would be for himself, and for everybody else … it does not matter that he does not have remorse, nor empathize with the victims.

In addition, this case also highlights the influence of misogynistic and supremacist rhetoric, as well as the need to understand how and why Minassian came to view other people as mere objects, such that he had no qualms in taking their lives, which is not a default position of being autistic. Neither are all incels neurodiverse, however, the online community, the unnuanced world views and the

---

[2]https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/dec/23/toronto-van-killer-autism-defence-alek-minassian

[3]https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/toronto/minassian-trial-decision-1.5933687

ability to provide reasons for issues that are otherwise unfathomable, means that incel is more appealing to those who are neurodiverse.

Motivations for Joining Incel Communities

Interview participants provided a variety of reasons for why individuals start engaging with incel communities and begin to self-identify as an incel; these explanations are inextricably centred around the themes of entitlement, rejection and failure to adhere to perceived societal expectations. There is a sense that these men feel excluded and are missing out by not having sex and romantic relationships, especially as this is something they came to expect would automatically happen for them, given the importance society places on such experiences:

> I believe most incels in the community are simply frustrated by not being able to find a girlfriend. (Tom)

> They feel left out while everyone else around them is enjoying someone. They go quite some time failing at dating over time becoming bitter. (Ian)

> I feel pressured to get a girlfriend by society and feel like a failure. I was lied to by my parents, TV, movies … about finding love and relationships. (Sam)

O'Malley et al. (2020) state that incel rhetoric may include normal anxieties of young men transitioning into adulthood. Certainly, many of the narratives presented online about the age where men were romantically rejected – turning them to the path of inceldom, feature exceptionally young ages – often in the early teens – 14 or 15 years old. It is doubtful, however, that they would have much experience to draw on as young teenagers and seems rather premature to predicate the rest of their world view on. This also suggests something rather entitled about the expectations of certain boys in regard to accessing girls, and how girls [should] be responsive to them, even from a young age. Incels are not unique when it comes to experiencing rejection at some point in their lives, and almost no one is immune to romantic failure, and the resulting craving, depression, fear and rage being rebuffed can cause (Baumeister & Dhavale, 2001). However, for incels what is viewed as a (albeit painful) normal rite of passage, engrosses them, instilling a need to seek out both internal and external explanations for their rejection:

> This disappointment shaped my life experience in a bad way. I thought I was cursed, didnt know its a natural experience, every man get rejected. I have became [*sic*.] numb of the Incel pain. (Sam)

The indication is that some boys and men are unprepared for disappointment and rejection, such that the pain of it occurring is overwhelming such that it has momentously shaped the rest of their lives. The perception that they are unique

that other boys and men do not experience it is striking and raises questions as to why and what led them to feel that way and what part did broader societal attitudes towards men and women play in this process.

For incels, the blackpill provides enticing reasons, presented with a veneer of validity under the guise of social and evolutionary theory, attractive to those raw from the misery of unrequited love. However, often incel narratives are less about finding love and a partner, rather anger and frustration are displayed in response to being denied sex, as this online post demonstrates:

> I didn't start being hateful with them. Why would I? I don't give a shit how foids behave or who they fuck, as long as they give me love too. But they won't. If I could find a girlfriend just by treating her nicely, do you think I would hate them? If women gave me sex the same as they give it to Chad, do you think I'd hate them? But they won't. That's why I hate them with passion. (Incel.co user)

In explaining the journey to becoming incel, interview participants too spoke about being rejected by girls; however, they were keen to impress the significance of romantic intimacy rather than sexual relationships. This focus on affection rather than sex may have been influenced, in part, by speaking with a female researcher, and aiming to appear more sympathetic, although it should be noted that if this was indeed the case in this instance, such self-awareness was not applied in other discussions, where there were plenty of 'no-holds barred' comments made about their opinions of women. Alternatively, participants might have wanted to provide a different presentation of self (Goffman, 1959) other than the 'sex-obsessed' entitled incel stereotype:

> What made me identify as an incel was when I realised how much I struggled with dating and even forming friends with girls. I pretty much never had any female friends in my life. (Ben)

> Being an incel is a lone battle. It has been a cycle of rejection from girls. Sometimes, it is because you are not smart, or you lack the social skills for courting. (Alex)

> Sex and intimacy go hand in hand It's very important factor in pair bonding with the other person in a relationship. Intimacy is the feeling great from your partner. It often involves cuddling, holding hands, trust, and support. Intimacy is where you enjoy your partner and create good memories with your partner. I feel it's essential, and it needs to go both ways meaning both partners need to feel intimate about each other. (Carl)

In the above description of intimacy, the importance of reciprocity is acknowledged, which implies that both parties should have autonomy. However, discussions within incel communities suggest that there is an issue with women not

automatically feeling this way. Therefore, incels want women to reciprocate their affections and when they don't this frustrates them and leads them to engage in hyperbolic conversations about removing women's ability to choose their romantic and sexual partners. Yet, this outcome would still be unsatisfying for them even if society were to degenerate into a *Handmaid's Tale*-type situation, as the interchange would be forced rather than mutually reached. Women's agency in being able to choose who they date and who they have sex with is often relied upon by incels to explain their lack of sexual success. Assuming a marginalised role, they view women as oppressors because their right to refuse sex has resulted in them feeling powerless, which weakens their position as men, who require and are entitled to sex (Anderson, 2005; Kimmel, 2010). Incels consistently reaffirm the perspective that women owe men sex, and refusal to provide this is in direct conflict to a man's feeling of masculinity (Anderson, 2005; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005; Kimmel, 2010).

Sex redistribution, as avowed by Valizadeh (more commonly known in the online sphere as Pick Up Artist (PUA) Roosh V), is viewed as a means to prevent incels from engaging in violence by meeting their sexual needs. However, if incel violence can completely be explained and even justified by incels acting out due to not having sex, this would absolve incel killers as due to their lack of romantic or sexual success with women their actions would simply be attempts at gaining attention, and hence, they would not be responsible for them (Jaki et al., 2019). The rationalisation of sexual deprivation for mass murder can be understood with Sykes and Matza's (1957) techniques of neutralization, whereby responsibility is denied through the perpetrator being a victim of their circumstance and forced into a situation beyond their control. Furthermore, denial of victim also applies, whereby the victim status has been appropriated from those who were the actual victims, by the perpetrator. In this instance, there is the implication that the victims deserved what happened to them, as they were mere collateral in the incel fight back against a society which (they claim) created them, appealing to higher loyalties as per Sykes and Matza's (1957) concept.

The argument behind sex redistribution is that the state should provide sex workers (though they are not referred to in such terms within the manosphere, rather they are reduced to whores) to incels. Training would be provided to ensure incels receive specialist treatment and are made to feel 'handsome', 'powerful' and 'confident'. Incels have suggested that the funding for this programme should come from single women paying tax upon birth control products. As sex workers are already a marginalised group vulnerable to abuse presenting them as a solution for misogynist and lonely men further dehumanises them. Moreover, this 'solution' contradicts the incel world view, sex workers do not even meet the subhuman category of women and sex with them is considered invalid such that an interviewee still claimed they were a virgin after a sexual encounter with a sex worker and as highlighted in the following quotation from Mike below:

> Many believe (also me) that having sex with a sex worker or a woman who is attracted mostly by your money isn't true sex because there isn't genuine attraction. So if you had sex only with sex workers then you're still virgin. (Mike)

The process of identifying as incel involves continued engagement with the incel community. It is not the case that individuals stumble across incels and the blackpill ideology online and then automatically realise that the answer to their unhappiness and/or other problems is that they are an incel. This might occur in some instances, but more often than not, it is a prolonged development with the growing recognition and awareness of identifying with the community and the ideology such that it pervades a person's sense of who they are and their core values. As per Rheingold's (1993) conceptualisation of virtual communities, the sense of being with like-minded others, those who have shared (negative) experiences, and being understood, is paramount:

> You find a community who would understand your frustrations and give you some sense of belonging, as well as something to tell you what to do. This is what I felt when I discovered not only the blackpill but all of the manosphere. You find like minded guys who have also experienced what you do. (Carl)

The Language and Ideology of Incels

For an extensive list of words used within the incel community, please see the Incel Vocabulary at the front of this book.

As already noted, incels have established their own unique vocabulary, some of which is shared by other groups in the manosphere as well as by the alt-right and alt-left. For example, the term 'cuck' emanating from cuckold, where a man (knowingly or unknowingly) is being cheated on by his female partner, is regularly employed as a slur through discussions on Reddit, 4chan and 8chan by all such alternative groups. Cuckold is a genre of pornography where a husband/boyfriend observes whilst their wife/girlfriend has sex with another man. Sometimes, the husband/boyfriend is an eager voyeur who has encouraged their wife/girlfriend to engage in this extra-marital/relationship activity, but generally, there is the implication of humiliation, with the man's property (the woman) being defiled by another (usually more sexually satisfying) man. There are also racial connotations, with the couple often being white and the other man being black, fuelling the trope of black men and white women. Although 'Cuck' is used throughout the manosphere and beyond to refer to situations where men are being cheated on, the term is also employed to castigate men who are sympathetic to women, in a healthy relationship (or entering into a new relationship) with a woman, or – the unthinkable – a feminist. In previous work with Alessia Tranchese (Tranchese & Sugiura, 2021), we explored the commonalities of the language of pornography with the language of incels and found that both pornography and incels are contrasting manifestations of the same entrenched societal misogyny, facilitated and exacerbated by contemporary digital technologies. It was not our claim that sexist or indeed misogynistic language was created by modern pornography or by incels, rather that both have drawn on and supplemented the repertory of sexist language accessible to them. Yet, the harms arising from the language of pornography and the language of incels are significant because they expand and

permeate back through mainstream society, further normalising men's violence and hatred towards women (MacKinnon, 1984). Incels use language and imagery, a 'script' (Tranchese & Sugiura, 2021), to convey their hate and resentment, and this also provides them with innovative means to disseminate hatred against women, beyond their group, both online and offline (Jane, 2016). However, this pronouncement of hatred does not just build a community/ies, but it also serves to act as a warning for women, a sign that they are not welcome in certain spaces and for them to be silenced. What Lewis, Rowe, Wiper (2017, p. 1464) describe as a 'territorial exclusivity', which defines the perimeters of what women can and cannot do, and where they can inhabit both online and offline.

Academics who have studied incel spaces have attempted to provide a cohesive explanation for their belief system. Zimmerman et al. (2018) describe incels' views as a political ideology grounded in both male supremacy and white supremacy and based on the notion that feminism has destroyed society. Baele et al. (2019) refer to the incel world view structure as rigid and impermeable, a characteristic of singular extremist beliefs. The ideological beliefs underpinning inceldom are extensive and often bizarre, with many ideas rooted in other parts of the manosphere and then extended. For example, the redpill contends that feminism has corrupted society such that women are unfairly advantaged. Incels expand upon this, claiming that the empowerment of women has led to the subjugation of men resulting from what they term 'sexual hegemony' – where most women are only interested in the top 20% of attractive men (Zimmerman et al., 2018). A common perspective readily found on incel sites, presented in various yet similar iterations, is 'Women are extremely shallow, selfish, and vile creatures who won't look past physical features'. An adulteration of Pareto's 80/20 rule is often referred to, incels allege that 80% of women desire and compete for the top 20% of men, and conversely, the bottom 80% of men are competing for the bottom 20% of women.

In order to highlight how women are solely concerned with looks, Alex discussed and shared studies with me that showed young men are having much less sex than young women, in the United States and Finland.[4] Although he noted that some of the explanations provided in an article from the *Washington Post*[5] did contribute to young men's lack of sex, such as residing with parents, rising unemployment, excessive use of technology, he questioned why it is only men who are having less sex, whilst the rate for women barely changed. He was critical of the media never introducing the possibility that men are having less sex, whilst women have more, because women's socio-economic statuses have risen so too have their standards, and since they don't need someone to support them financially, they place greater emphasis on physical beauty. 'But no for mass media and the public

[4]https://ifstudies.org/blog/who-are-the-men-without-sex https://incels.co/threads/finnish-study-confirms-that-18-24-women-are-having-more-sex-than-same-age-men.88377/

[5]https://www.google.com/amp/s/www.washingtonpost.com/business/2019/03/29/share-americans-not-having-sex-has-reached-record-high/%3foutputType=amp

(especially feminists), it's always because incels are socially inept, misogynist or play video games 24h a day' (Alex).

Alex was keen to stress that this is not a theory concocted by himself or other incels, rather it came from evolutionary psychologists like Drivers, Buss and Schmitt. Here topics such as evolved mate preferences and sexual strategies theory are referred to. These are peer-reviewed scientific studies, with pertinent points to understand sexual attraction; however, they do not make generalised assertions about all people in all contexts, whilst the incel application is to do just that, particularly with women. Also, this completely negates the subjectivity in what physical qualities people find attractive.

Ian was dismissive of feminists, claiming that their perception of incels was distorted and that they had disregarded the problem of male sexlessness or viewed it as an entirely male problem. He told me that he had lurked on feminist Facebook groups and when the statistics about young men not having sex were released, members of the feminist sites suggested that men were having much less heterosexual sex because they were becoming gay or because women were becoming lesbian. This was a preposterous explanation to him as it was completely at odds with his heteronormative world view:

> How much delusional do you have to be to think that this is the cause of the problem? It's like a Nazi, that after visiting Auschwitz and listening to Holocaust survivors' stories, still negates that the Holocaust happened.

Drawing on the feminazi slur: 'I started to think (and I still think) that women are the real Nazists' (Ian).

Incels manipulate scientific logic and claim that women are biologically wired to find the best DNA to 'breed' with and therefore aim to reproduce with men who have 'good genes', a concept they refer to as 'female hypergamy'. Incels draw on the halo effect (Thorndike, 1920) to supplement their position that men who look good are perceived better than men who don't. Incels argue that women are willing to endure abuse in order to achieve this and, in fact, consider it a 'sign' that they have baited a dominant male. This rhetoric is prevalent through incel forums, providing incels with licence to victim-blame and apportion responsibility upon women for their experiences of domestic abuse, further denying the reality of misogyny.

Others in the 'manosphere' and 'lookism' circles subscribe to the redpill and believe that by becoming aware of their reality, their situation can change (e.g. by going to the gym – 'gymmaxxing', having aesthetic surgery or practising 'pick up' skills). However, by taking the blackpill, incels are awakened to the immutability of reality and consider it impossible to escape the social hierarchy that excludes them. Incels also conceptualise a 'total hypergamy', which they refer to as the 'crisis situation' resulting from evolution accelerated by technological progress. Within 'total hypergamy', female hypergamy has supposedly reached its zenith, Western civilisation is doomed and the complete emasculation of men is inevitable. For those who ascribe to the redpill though, there is a belief that by learning what they call 'the game' (essentially PUA strategies), they can manipulate women

to having sex with them and in doing so become strong alpha males, regaining their masculinity. Further to this, 'lookism', which is a central feature of the redpill philosophy (Papadamou et al., 2020), is the overarching logic of all social interactions, to overcome the problem of women purely seeking Chads or alphas as partners. Increased competition means more pressure for betas to look fit and so 'lookism' is the solution. The PUA community, for example, exchanges tips on how to improve their appearance by 'looksmaxxing' to boost their chances of sexual success. For incels, who differ in their nihilistic belief that it is impossible to improve one's situation, this results in their further marginalisation.

The incel world view also incorporates 'radical dualism', which highlights the contradictory nature of incels – they are simultaneously both superior in intellect and values yet are also subhuman and worthless due their ugliness. As the 'in-group', incels are smarter, hold pro-social values and in being romantic and seeking true love, and not guided by sex or looks, are positioned firmly on the moral high ground over women who are considered to be the polar opposite, Chads – who because of their fortune in being born attractive and being able to sexually attract women are complacent and stupid, betas – are wasting their time attempting to change themselves, and cucks – in supporting women are sustaining the systemic oppression of incels. As such, everyone else is the 'out-group', with women being top of the hated list. Women are dehumanised, referred to as 'femoids', 'foids' or 'roasties', deemed to have only simple emotions such as sexual desire, and drawing on tired old sexist tropes, are guided by antisocial values, such as cheating, gold digging and leeching the welfare state. Radical dualism is characteristic of many extremist groups (Abbas & Awan, 2015; Rip, Vallerand, & Lafrenière, 2012; Taylor, 1998) and also lends itself to a propensity for violence.

Incels believe that, by protecting women's bodily autonomy, feminists have ruined the natural order of society, which requires heterosexual monogamous relationships, and as a result, physically attractive young women – the 'Stacys' – only choose to sleep with the most attractive men – 'Chads'.

> Genetics is a fundamental and a very important ideology of the blackpill and incels believe that unless you're born with the right genes you have no chance of dating or being attractive. We strongly believe that looks are the only reason men have sex. Incels are frustrated that we don't have the right looks and that women are selfish because they only date Chads. (Lee)

Incels place looks on a numerical scale from 1 to 10 (with 10 being the greatest value) in order to rate and compare the innate value of an individual, framing discussions such as 'any 5/10 woman can land a 6/10 or 7/10 boyfriend and/or husband'.

An OkCupid study[6] on the differences in how women rate the attractiveness of men's dating profile photos and vice versa was also highlighted to me as part of the blackpill (Alex – 'This is just one of the blackpill studies that made me change

[6]https://archive.is/ZJymw

my view about women'). The study found that men rated women's pictures, on a scale from 0 to 5, with women as likely to be considered extremely beautiful as extremely ugly, with the majority of women rated *medium*. The female equivalent of the chart showed that women rated 80% of men's profile pictures as worse looking than medium, which is used as evidence of women's shallowness, although people are, of course, free to decide who they deem attractive or not. What the study also addresses, however, and what incels who rely on it to inform their blackpill perspective, overlook, is that irrespective of being seemingly more generous in their aesthetic judgements, the men tend to only reach out to the women they consider the *most attractive*, whilst women, who although were harsher in assessing looks, messaged men who they considered *less attractive* or *medium* anyway. Therefore, in actual fact, what this study illustrates is how much more important a woman's looks are than a man's.

Another aspect of the blackpill is sexual racism, the alternative of just be white (JBW), which is the perspective that women will always favour white (attractive/rich) men for their sexual partners; hence, incels who are also non-white automatically face further discrimination due to the colour of their skin. Although there is certainly a truism in the marginalisation of persons due to not being white and discriminations can and indeed do intersect as per Crenshaw's (1990) concept, in this context, the label of discrimination has been applied by incels themselves rather than them being a recognised marginalised group. In the incelsphere, there is racial hierarchy when it comes to dating, white men are at the top – with the Chads reigning supreme, then due to stereotypes about their sexual prowess – black men are next – the Tyrones, in terms of the attractiveness scale only white and black men exist on this before the betas and incels who are comprised of the ugly white and black men – other ethnicities are not deemed attractive – then rated lowest there are the Asian incels – the currycels and the ricecels. For Pete, the study that made him go 'full blackpill' was the Asian Sexual Gender Gap,[7] which he claims shows that Asian men are rated as the least attractive men by women of all races, even by Asian women.

Due to not meeting hegemonic masculine standards and feeling that women are unfairly favoured in society, incels view themselves as the oppressed. An example they provide is in regard to the body positivity movement, which in their view, is promoting 'fat-acceptance' for women, but overlook how men are absent from these conversations. Incels also draw comparisons between negative responses to body size and height to emphasise what they see as double standards. In their view, short men are susceptible to public ridicule, which is not problematised the same way that commentary about overweight women is. Incels also highlight how weight can be lost (many conversations consider people to be overweight as a result of being lazy) whilst a short incel cannot change their height.

Incels believe that before the 1960s 'sexual revolution', every man had equal access to women, though they provide no evidence for this. Further, they see the

[7]https://medium.com/a-m-awaken-your-inner-asian/an-executive-summary-on-the-intermarriage-in-the-asian-community-5852043e684a

shift towards female empowerment as a profound injustice because society has failed to give men access to what they are entitled to (women's bodies):

> A normal healthy relationship is becoming more difficult to achieve due to the price of pussy. (/r/incels user)

Incels are therefore frustrated at a world that they believe is denying them power and sexual control and view feminism as an oppressive ideology that must be fought against, in order to reclaim a type of 'manhood' that only honours white male superiority. An argument propagated within incel communities is because incels did not exist in the past when gender roles were more rigidly enforced and women had fewer rights, this negates feminists' explanation for incels being caused by the patriarchy or 'toxic masculinity'. However, this dispute is inherently flawed as it only further signifies that incels are a reaction to societal progression and gender equality. Moreover, the contribution of a digital society (Powell et al., 2018) enabling communities to assimilate together on and offline in a union of hatred and violence has been overlooked. Incels do not exist and do not solely occur within an online vacuum; their world view has roots in and is validated by broader society, from the subtle instances of sexism to the blatant discriminations espoused within respected figures in politics and the media, which will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 5. Although it is noted that if were not for the internet, incels would not have formed in the mass and manner they have. Internet culture is at the core of the incel community, as seen in their idiosyncratic language, and were it not for the global reach and communicative properties of being online, incels as a distinguishable group, and certainly using this name, would not prevail. The digital self is still very much part of the physical, however because of the understanding of the perceptions towards incels, that part of one's identity is carefully managed offline (Goffman, 1963). It is not as though incels are one person online and then another offline, rather that part of their persona is kept hidden in face-to-face interactions because they are aware of how they will be treated otherwise:

> I have only identified as an incel only online, it's better to keep it separate from my personal life offline. I feel there's a stigma against incels being mistaken as potentially dangerous people by the media. (Ian)

> My IRL friends just knew that I browsed those forums but I never engaged in a deep speech with anyone IRL. (Mike)

However, Tom described how in confiding in his (offline) friends, they helped him to renounce the incel label and understand how other reasons were affecting him, helping him to communicate with women and therefore see them from a different un-blackpilled perspective:

> I opened up to it for a few of my friends but they knew I wasn't 100% incel, they knew I was just very socially awkward due to my

> anxiety and I didn't have many interactions with women but they helped me fix it. (Tom)

This experience suggests that there is an opportunity for individuals to receive a positive outcome by trusting others outside of the incel community, with the knowledge of them being an incel/identifying with incel ideology. Individuals may get the support they need and be turned away from a potentially damaging trajectory.

This was also the case with John:

> I was never open about it offline, except with my best friend with whom I shared that I follow TRP and also believe blackpill. He made me pull out of it and I'm very thankful to him for that. I have never met anyone in real life who is an incel. (John)

For John, offline equates with real life, as per the classic internet abbreviation IRL, interactions with incels online were not viewed as occurring in person. A distinction is made between the online and offline. Indeed, supplementing this, there is no indication that incels ever meet up offline or are aware of others in their existing social circles who also identify as incel, such communication generally transpires and is contained online. This may well be to do with the fact that many incels struggle in social situations and are more confident interacting virtually and so would not seek to meet up with others in person:

> As a former incel myself it's rather difficult for me to spot incels in real life, but usually they are socially awkward or isolated. (Tom)

Also, the creation of an offline version does not appear to be the purpose of the incel community, who just appear to be content to remain online. Regardless the offline impacts are noted, in this particularly disconcerting quotation from Carl:

> Offline, you won't know who is a part of this toxic cult or not but as I mentioned incels lack social skills and self confidence. Who knows that quiet guy at your workplace or your apartment/house next door secretly hates you. (Carl)

However, Mike spoke about how he keeps in contact with other incels on a one-to-one basis via WhatsApp and Telegram and claimed knowledge of some offline incel meetings. However, he personally had not attended them due to distance issues but also because he did not want to reveal his actual identity, for fear of the potential repercussions and stigmatisation that could ensue as noted earlier, if another incel were to contact his friends and family and expose him as an incel and actively participating in incel communities. The affordance of being anonymous online is a double-edged sword for incels; on the one hand, this allows them to protect their real identity, while, on the other hand, it also means that they do not know if others are actually who they say they are and therefore cannot be trusted.

This notion of incels betraying one another is evidenced in the following example discussed by Sam. The motivation appears less about harm and more about undertaking a prank:

> It didn't happen to me but to an incel guy who lost his job after getting doxed by some incels who contacted his employer. They did it because they thought it was funny and probably they didn't realise the gravity of their actions, but still they did a mess. (Sam)

Although, there are obvious ways to evoke the wrath of other incels, making 'cucked' statements supporting women and feminism is an obvious example, but it is unclear as to what behaviour inspires incels to engage in harassment (irrespective of whether they view it that way) against others in the community.

A further reason to protect one's identity whilst engaging in incel communities is to do with the possibility that there are also people pretending to be incels:

> Also some members of incel communities aren't really incels but feminists (either male or female) who mask themselves as incels to infiltrate online incel communities (Facebook groups or forums) to gather information on them and they can use that information in a toxic way. I know this because I've been doxed by feminists and I discovered their private and secret anti-incel Facebook groups infiltrating them with a fake name. So it's not safe to reveal your identity in incel communities because you can be betrayed by incels themselves but also from spies. (Alex)

It doesn't escape me that this revelation has connotations for my own role in this study as well as wider research and how researchers access online communities and interpret the conversations and activities within those spaces. Certainly, where information is readily available in the public domain, there is a tendency within academic research to view this as fair game data, bypassing the usual requirement of informed consent, with little to no consideration of the thoughts and feelings of those providing that information. This is especially problematic when the research focus is on particular groups and behaviours. However, there is a distinction between joining an online community and deliberately deceiving the other members, in order to access conversations and observing discussions on a public forum that does not require membership to do so (Sugiura, Wiles, & Pope, 2017).

Feminists as the enemy are also emphasised in the above quotation, with the notion that they are actively seeking to penetrate incel spaces to harm them. This plays into the blackpill philosophy that feminism is threatening the very survival of men, especially those who are aware of the damage it is inflicting, and so it makes sense that clandestine feminists would be attempting to dismantle the incel community in this instance. Here again, incels are assuming the victim status. Notwithstanding the dedicated accounts on other platforms such as Twitter, which do repost some of the most extreme and concerning incel posts that Alex refers

to, and threads such as r/inceltears, which mocks incel posts. Others, however, who make what incels would deem to be 'bluepilled' comments also get accused of being covert feminists and are pursuing the downfall of the community.

In considering the emergence of incels as an online phenomenon, undoubtably, there were individuals prior to incels and even the internet, who experienced loneliness and rejection, but they were not presented with such a countercultural captivating explanation that they could engage with whilst simultaneously continuing with the rest of their life. People can self-identify as an incel and participate in online incel communities, without others such as their friends and families knowing. In effect, incels can keep their offline and online personas separate, although the same cannot be said of their perspectives and world view, which does become all consuming. If incels were an offline group such as one of the Men's Rights Movement (MRM) communities discussed in Chapter 2, this would be far difficult to conceal, and they would also not be permitted to engage in the overt misogyny, homophobia, transphobia, racism and ableism that they do online, as the excuse of such behaviour being ironic or satire would unlikely be upheld.

Another provocative issue widely discussed by incels is the vindication of sex with underage girls. As women who have had previous sexual partners are vilified by incels and described in various derogatory and dehumanising ways, the notion of younger girls, who in being chaste and virginal, is infinitely more appealing to incels. On the now defunct /r/incels statutory rape was challenged as a crime and described as 'attractive teenage girls at their peak'. On a survey on incels.co, a quarter of the sample – 25.9% of the respondents – stated the preference for their 'dream hook-up or gf' was 'under 16 super pedo level'. Although the language used could indicate that this response is meant to be shocking and jokey, nevertheless, there is also something particularly quixotic about this, providing insight into incel desires. For incels, who feel repressed by women, age also equates with greater or less submissiveness. Young girls are likely to be less confident than mature women and have less agency and bodily autonomy. This combined with the notion of being 'untouched' makes them ideal females to incels; however, this perspective is not unique to the incel community, with endorsement for the sexualisation of young girls both overtly and symbolically present societally.

Revered scholars over the decades have even expressed what seems like support for sexual relationships with children. Michael Foucault (1978) talked about the sexuality of children throughout *The History of Sex*. In one example, he described a story in 1867, of a 'simple-minded farm hand' and his attempted rape of a young girl (Foucault, 1978, p. 31), the importance of which for Foucault was not the rape of the child, but rather that this led to the state intervening and investigating child abuse, or as Foucault named them, these 'timeless gestures' and 'everyday pieces of theatre' of 'barely furtive pleasures between simple-minded adults and alert children' (1978, pp. 31–32; Jones, 2020, p. 11). For Foucault (1978) societal intervention on sexual violence towards a child was mere 'pettiness' (p. 31). Recently, allegations about Foucault being a paedophile, substantiating these predilections, have been made.

The Gender Schema Theory (Bem, 1981) maintains that the consumption of media images leads to internalised perceptions and expectations of masculinity and

femininity. Anime, hand drawn and computer animation originating from Japan – notably an openly patriarchal society, is incredibly popular amongst incels as well as having dedicated subcultures online. Female anime characters are child-like, dependent, submissive, with exaggerated feminised features and costumes – such as big eyes, petite figures, tiny waists, large breasts and, more often than not, wearing schoolgirl or sailor outfits. Anime has also influenced pornography such that there is a dedicated category named *hentai* for those who have a sexual fetish for these cartoon characters, which presents even greater distortions of womanhood. Bresnahan, Inoue, and Kagawa (2006) highlighted the negative consequences of viewing such sexually skewed media content. In particular, Bresnahan et al. (2006) emphasised how these images reinforce sexist stereotypes, especially about Asian women, and noted that women in both Japan and North America have struggled to achieve equality. These types of media affirm gendered role expectations of male power and female subjugation, whilst bolstering the perception that women are intellectually inferior to men, essentially both nourishing and validating incels core beliefs.

Incel Spaces and Norms

The origins of incel, in regard to the community of men which is the focus of this book, can be traced back to 2003 in memes on 4chan's Imageboard. Then, in 2005, PUAs posted about 'The Game' on Reddit, which provided tips and tricks to manipulate women into having sex. In 2009, the manosphere was mentioned on blogspot, before subreddits for men's issues (usually with or because of women) began emerging in 2012. From these, the incel community as we know it today started developing and inceldom became the topic on various sites, videos and forums, most notoriously, r/incels, which at the time of being banned in November 2017 had approximately over 40,000 subscribers. After the closure of r/incels, subsequently r/braincels became the most popular subreddit for incels, with 16,900 followers by April 2018. This, however, was also closed in October 2018.

The individuals who participated in interviews generally spoke of frequenting more mainstream platforms such as Twitter, Instagram and YouTube and the well-known incel sites and forums on Reddit, etc., rather than notorious places such as 4chan and 8chan, renowned for abuse and offensive behaviours. Interview participants spoke about being directed to /r/thredpill and /r/incelswithouthate after searching for support and advice about relationships. From there, specific searches would also be undertaken using terms such as the redpill, Men Going Their Own Way (MGTOW) and incels on YouTube, the features of which would then recommend further videos and channels such as that by Monday FA Monday.[8] The now defunct r/braincels was also described as a gateway space to becoming an incel, whilst returnofkings and Rooshvforum were also noted as other prominent sites. Others spoke about how their curiosity was piqued after

[8] *Monday FA Monday*, also known as, '*Monday Blue*', was a vlogger and public figure who used to vlog about his inceldom and the incelosphere. Although he frequently used the self-identifier 'forever alone', he also uses the terms 'incel' and 'forever alone' interchangeably.

they read about incels in the mainstream media, most notably after the term was associated with high-profile attacks, whilst some noted that they first learnt of incels on Twitter, where they were being spoken about disparagingly and from there went to incel subreddits to learn more. It does appear that the same people are members of incel groups across different platforms. Although interview participants were keen to highlight that there are probably many more people who identify as incel or at least align with the incel philosophy, but do not describe themselves in this way, on spaces that aren't ordinarily incel related, due to the negativity directed towards the community. There is also the recognised overlap with the other manosphere groups and conflation of anyone who expresses misogynistic views as being an incel, as Tom states:

> Some people are MGTOW and had a relationship or marriage and got badly burned so they bash women online, however incels also bash women in almost the exact same way, so it's hard to tell. I think many people assume they are just incels. (Tom)

Not all of those present on incel sites are self-identifying incels, but they consider themselves to be affiliated with the community due to a shared belief in the blackpill or redpill ideology and other ideas typical of these places. However, to be an accepted and active participant of incel spaces, such that you aren't trolled or forced to leave under your current username, it is not necessarily the case that men have to be virgins or truecels, or even considered ugly or unsuccessful with women, but it is imperative that members are open about their dogma, and that it is supportive of the blackpill. As Mike informed me 'a blackpilled Chad has more in common with incels compared to a virgin male feminist'.

The suggestion from those I spoke with is that there is no hierarchy within the incel community and no individuals assuming leadership roles, although Roosh V was noted for returnofkings, rather the community can be understood by the networks of online boards and YouTube channels. There are the founders and moderators who uphold the rules of various sites, but these were deemed not to impose their individual views. Even without a clear organisation structure though, and certainly from immersing oneself within the online incel activity, there are those who have more influence with established reputations, based off their followers and subscribers on YouTube for example. Therefore, although these people are not necessarily presenting themselves as leaders as such, their prominence amongst incels cannot be underestimated.

The incelsphere was also described as a cult by John:

> They [incels] are actually a lot bigger than I originally thought they were and are pretty much a cult. I didn't realise how toxic all of it was until I left the blackpill. People in a cult never know they are in a cult, and how toxic their ideologies are.
>
> As someone who was a strong believer of both and spent a considerable time in both the online communities, both TRP and incels/blackpill originate out of similar ideas that society has been unfair

> to men and modernity/liberalism/feminism is toxic but both are very different in ideology and practice. A lot of people who haven't been in the manosphere seem to confuse the two. Both are very toxic cults, are very different in ideas and reality. At some points both even hate each other. If you disagree with any of their points or go against them you're met with hostility, insults etc. Think of it as interacting with a cult or a radical religious group… Black Pill isn't a community, it's a dangerous cult. (John)

The concept of cult was implicit in the work of Howard Becker on spiritualism, who described cult in terms of an 'amorphous, loose-textured, uncondensed type of social structure … is that of purely personal ecstatic experience, salvation, comfort and mental or physical healing' (Von Wiese & Becker cited in Nelson, 1968). Becker's interpretation formed the basis of the definition provided by J. Milton Yinger (1957, cited in Nelson, 1968), who maintained that a cult is normally a small, short-lived group, developed around the personality of a charismatic leader. In the absence of a dominant human guide, the indication from John is that the blackpill and the mandatory complicity of believing in its components demanded this role in the incel community.

Groomed for Hate?

Baele et al. (2019) conducted a study of the Incels.me forum, using a mixed-methods content analysis approach in order to investigate how the structure of the incel world view results in support and motivation for violence. This research was concerned with the social categories and causal narratives of the incel ideology and concluded that not only are incels' views extremist, but they also occupy a specific extreme position separate from the rest of the 'manosphere' in subscribing to the idea of the blackpill. Baele et al. (2019) suggest that this world view is dangerous, as it leads incels to not only harm themselves but also to commit 'cathartic' acts of violence against women and others who 'oppress' them.

There is frustration amongst incels about how they are portrayed in the media and perceived to be all violent and full of hatred. It is not the purpose of this book to fuel the assumption that all incels are dangerous; however, it is also not going to undermine the very real threat that some incels or those affiliated with the incel philosophy pose, especially to women. Yet, many incels are vulnerable, suffering with anxiety and depression, and/or neurodiverse, which in turn can make them more susceptible to the blackpill. Moreover, it is this ideology and its influence on some men that is most concerning. As it is only men, self-identifying as incels or who have connections with the incel community, who have committed acts of violence and murder, the focus is on them rather than other genders. Amongst the online canonisation and support (whether faux or not) for the mass murders committed by the likes of Elliot Rodger and Alek Minassian, there are those who actively take a stand and denounce such atrocities and attempt to distance themselves from this mindset. However, their voices are often difficult to draw out from the cacophony of outrage, resentment and deliberate provocation overwhelmingly present within

incel communities. Nevertheless, even those who claim not to condone the actions of Elliot Rodger and Alek Minassian, still sympathise with their narratives about being galvanised to kill because of being rejected by women:

> I can understand their frustration as they [Rodger and Minassian] grew up believing if they are just good, the right girl will come to them only to see that never happen to them. It's hard to see someone who is a decent human being from the beginning only grow bitter and increasingly resentful towards women, not because they can't find a girlfriend, but that the world lied to them about finding one. (Lee)

It is intriguing that both Elliot Rodger and Alek Minassian are described as decent human beings, who were negatively shaped by the societal expectations about accessing women.

Loneliness is apparent with incels, though violence and aggression within the communities is less common, certainly fewer than what might be expected given the narrative presented about incels. However, there is still enough to warrant concern, and it does vary depending on the different platforms. For example, on /r/incelswithouthate subreddit, as the name suggests, hatred is unwelcome, and this is a space for incels that want to distance themselves away from that typecasting. Here the rules are clear, members must not induce hatred or violence, and certainly not praise those referred to as 'incel terrorists' – the likes of Elliot Rodger, Alex Minassian, etc. Whilst discussions vary on the dedicated incels sites such as incel.co and incels.net – from the despondent to the outright hateful, with limited suggestion of satire. On incels.co, there are a variety of threads, from those who seek to challenge the default position of incels being full of hatred for women to discussions justifying why hating women is a natural conclusion, to pure misogyny – where posts exalting the rape and murder of women are blatant. The tone is unsurprisingly more provocative and shocking on Reddit, 4chan and 8chan, evoking the 'shitposting' argument. Nevertheless, across the different platforms, the 'ironic' misogynistic, racist, 'worship of mass murderers', 'enforced monogamy' rhetoric is harmful and perpetuates discrimination, irrespective of whether or not incels are being serious or actually believe in what they are saying.

Where hatred is specifically mentioned by members in incel communities, it is inevitably levelled towards women foremost, although Chads are also noted as being hated. Along with this hatred, though, there is also a sense of grudging admiration for these men whom incels believe have the life that they should have if nature hadn't dealt them the poorest hand. Chads are also weaponised by incels, who discuss how they, in having access to women sexually, are able to physically hurt them and carry out the abuses that incels would want to do if they were given the opportunity. Hence, posts revelling in Chads raping and sexually abusing foids are easily found on incel sites:

> I rejoice every time a foid gets killed by her Chad bf. I laugh every time one of them gets raped for being a whore. They rejected me just because I'm ugly. They deserve it.

(Incels.co user)

Rejection is a core reason for incels' hatred of women. There are endless stories about how women have caused hurt and distress, ranging from them not speaking to or noticing a particular man, turning down a request for a date, to cheating on their partners. The commonality is that women are not living up to the expectations of these men.

There is no set number of rejections that lead a man to turn to inceldom. For some, they have never experienced direct rejection, but because they have had little to do with women and have thus not had a relationship or sex, they think that all women are actively repudiating them. This is enough to hate women, retaliating against those they feel already loathe them, based off a caricature created by the blackpill rather than any actual informed knowledge. Those who have been turned down have experienced these situations ranging from once to enough times that it registers as a pattern depending on the individual, such that the rejection is described as continually occurring, impacting upon how they perceive women. The espousing of hatred is a way of regaining the control they feel they have lost about themselves. The hurt experienced from being cheated on has led some men, identifying as incel or at least engaging with the incel community, to generalise all women as unfaithful. The blackpill provides a persuasive explanation for some men's lack of success with women and the biological standardisation of women to be deceptive. Therefore, equipped with this knowledge, the next logical step is to hate the cause of the distress:

> Basically take a virgin, insecure and socially inept guy, radicalise him with toxic ideas that all his problems and failures are society's and women's fault, make him full of hatred. He'll start interacting with others like him online, and there you go you have an incel. (Tom)

Jaki et al. (2019) conducted an analysis of the forum website Incels.me, investigating the group dynamics of the community, particularly how incels create ingroup identity and how they construct outgroups, such as women. They explored the vernacular used by incels and applied automatic profiling techniques in order to determine the traits of posters (e.g. gender, ethnicity), before discussing the hate speech posted on the forums. The study concluded that a significant proportion of the discourse could be classified as hate speech, with the forum being full of misogyny, anti-feminism and homophobia. Overall, Jaki et al. (2019) classified incels as an 'alliance of necessity' for isolated young men with a largely negative mindset and pronounced misogynistic views.

Barbara Perry (2001), a leading hate crime scholar, notes that the internet has enabled groups that were previously fractured to come together online. Although the dynamic of the incel community is borne from the internet and would not exist in the manner it does without the networked technology enabling its inception, much of the mindset pre-existed and continues to co-exist offline. Overtly stating hatred against women offline could prove problematic for men, and it is difficult to identify others for whom this perspective resonates with, but online, under the guise of anonymity and emboldened by the support of a community,

it is easy to discover kindred others who share that animosity: 'Unfortunately they find comfort and support in such spaces which then radicalise them' (John).

Rebellion and uprising are terms in frequent use on incel forums – the notion that incels need to rebel against 'foids' and wider society. However, the discussions involving rebellion include different suggestions ranging from catfishing women using false identities accompanying images of Chads they have taken without that man's consent, making fun of the simps and cucks who support women, NEETmaxxing – which is essentially withdrawing from social and work life by not participating in education, employment or training, the mandated use of sex workers or sex robots, to proposals about their own suicides and the fantasies/threats of mass murder. Often there are disclaimers alongside these ideas, such as acknowledgement that these suggested uprisings are not actually going to come to fruition, but the core motivation driving the insurgent mindset is about creating an environment in which it is easier for incels to get girlfriends, believing in a twisted and paradoxical manner, that alienating and abusing women is going to help them achieve this. Incels still desire women, even though they consider women to be vile and debased, this inclination advances their frustrations and bitterness internally and externally, because knowing this 'truth' about women hasn't alleviated them of their longing for sex and intimacy. Hence, the declarations of hatred and even violence to discharge the tensions, much of which, may well be lip service. The issue, however, is knowing what could get acted upon and who could engage in it. Here it is not the case that individuals aren't wearing the warning signs of a would-be attacker, instead there is an overabundance of accounts that contain potential red flags, from the profiles to the posts made that condone or 'call' for violence, as such identifying what is empty talk as opposed to actual threats is extremely challenging.

It is acknowledged that not all incels are a threat, in that they are not going to engage in physical violence and are at risk of carrying out a terror attack; however, this is not to minimise the harms of the ideology not only to wider society but to the community internally. Many incels are accepting of their misery and have resigned themselves to living their lives in unhappiness and hopelessness, and their outlet is to bitterly pontificate about women and society amongst their incel peers. In this community, they have achieved the acceptance unattainable elsewhere, and here, they can indulge in their fantasies about how they could exact retribution. It is these delusions and the lack of nuance as to where the boundaries are between imagination and reality that are problematic, especially to those who are viewing life as futile and could be easily suggestible. Therefore, it is important to recognise the risks that some men who identify as incel, or are influenced by incel ideology, or seek to exploit the notoriety from being associated with the incel community, pose: 'Radicalising one into being an incel is much easier than you think, especially if the guy is young' (Ben).

On Twitter, I have observed many provocative discussions between incels, or at least from accounts pertaining to be incels, and those who are attempting to challenge incels and/or raise awareness or gain an understanding of them. I emphasise that accounts are claiming to be incels rather than definitively stating they are incels as naturally, I have limited evidence in which this can be verified against. There are also debates about copycat incels, potential trolls, aiming to benefit from the notoriety of the community, to gain attention and provoke emotive

responses, as trolls delight in doing; however, due to the anonymity afforded by being online, this is difficult to prove or disprove. Such accounts usually have a graphic or anime/manga character for their profile picture, incel generally features within their username, and the bio will more than likely make references to the blackpill or other associated incel traits, so there is little to identify the individual behind the account. A perennial issue, receiving attention on Twitter, is that about the dangers posed by incels. Where users have posted questions pertaining to this or indeed persons dedicated to tackling incels have taken screenshots of posts to evidence the threat, incel accounts, who weren't part of the original thread, often respond to present alternative arguments. This also indicates that incel accounts are searching – potentially using keyword searches or hashtags or receiving notifications when the term 'incel' is cropping up in tweets and then intercepting those discussions. For example, in a conversation (started by a woman) about how widespread incels are and their effects, an incel account entered into the discussion to counteract these concerns with the argument that more risk is posed from partners rather than incels, irrespective of how incels do wish harm upon women. In this instance, this claim is correct – intimate partner violence (IPV) or gender-based violence (GBV) is one of the most pervasive forms of men's violence against women. Despite the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women (United Nations Human Rights, 48/104/1993), global estimates published by the World Health Organization[9] continue to indicate that about one in three (35%) of women worldwide have experienced either physical and/or sexual IPV or non-partner sexual violence in their lifetime. A global study on gender-related killing of women and girls indicates that women killed by intimate partners or family members accounts for 58% of all female homicide victims reported globally, and that little progress has been made in preventing such murders[10]. Nevertheless, attempting to diminish the risks posed by one group by diverting attention elsewhere is unhelpful as those risks remain regardless of that other threat being significantly greater. Mass murder that has been conducted by incels, in the name of incel ideology, or those claiming to have been associated with the incel community, are undeniably far fewer than the deaths caused by IPV; however, it would be problematic to disregard these because of this comparison. The victims of those appalling attacks had not set out to interact with incels or persons purporting to be incels, and yet tragically lost their lives nonetheless, and even if they had meant to engage with incels, would never have deserved what happened to them.

Further, in response to the concerns about the threats posed, the incel account claimed that people, normies, outsiders to the incel community, would have to go out of their way to find them. Considering how easy it is to discover incel activity through a mere google search, this is not strictly true. Moreover, as demonstrated in the earlier discussions about how the interview participants first found out about incels and began their journeys to self-identifying as incel, it is not necessarily the case that people were searching for the community, or even knew about

[9]https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/violence-against-women
[10]https://www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/GSH2018/GSH18_Gender-related_killing_of_women_and_girls.pdf

them in the first instance, rather they were seeking answers for their loneliness or relationship failures/ rejection, and it was these searches that drew them to incels. In other situations, individuals were exposed to incel ideologies and parlance via gaming sites. Therefore, it is relatively easy to find incels, even if you are not directly looking for them, and more significantly, their beliefs are not unique nor contained within incel spaces; instead, these ideas permeate in wider society such that they fuel and reinforce hatred against women and other marginalised groups. Also, returning to the bios of such accounts, in some instances, these contradict the assertions made regarding the minimising of the incel risk, by praising infamous serial killers of women such as Jack the Ripper and the Long Island murderer,[11] who receive extra credence for not getting caught.

Effects of the Blackpill

There are commonalities between MGTOW and incels, particularly in relation to how the latter are impacted by the blackpill. Some incels describe, how after being awakened to the blackpill realities, they are no longer interested in women and don't want to pursue sex or relationships with women anymore.[12] MGTOW also reject women and actively veto the notion of sex and relationships with them too, undertaking the adverse of incels – voluntary celibacy (though this term is not necessarily utilised by MGTOW) – as they would not engage in homosexual relationships either. This last point is significant, as lesbianism, within the manosphere, is viewed as a way to deny men sex rather than someone's sexual orientation. However, for MGTOW, the distinction between them and incels is that they feel empowered by dismissing women, and they retain control, whilst incels are apathetic and powerless, and their situation is one borne of resignation. MGTOW also aim to avoid contact with women in any part of their lives wherever possible.

The long-term effects of the blackpill are palpable and negative perceptions of women remain, even for those who claim they aren't incels anymore:

> I don't care about having sex or a relationship with them [women] because I despise them morally. If I have to get sex I need to make the least effort possible (knowing that on the first date probably I won't get sex is a turn off for me). I also rejected a girl that wanted to hang out with me a few days ago because I consider it a waste of time. And my libido is still ok and I fap daily. Why waste time with women when I can simply fap and turn off the desire. (Tom)

[11]The *Long Island serial killer* (also referred to as *LISK*, the *Gilgo Beach Killer* or the *Craigslist Ripper*) is an unidentified suspected serial killer who is believed to have murdered 10–16 people over a period of nearly 20 years, mostly sex workers and left their bodies in areas on the South Shore of Long Island, New York.

[12]https://incels.co/threads/did-you-lose-interest-in-pursuing-women-after-the-blackpill-read-before-answer.145718/#post-3062914

The disillusionment with women caused from believing in the blackpill suggests that even if incels do start having sex or enter into romantic relationships (with women they want) and ascend from incel, they will not become happy and fulfilled. This dispiritingly implies that there is no return from the effects of the blackpill. Interview participants spoke about the bitterness caused by the blackpill, tainting their ability to enjoy sex and affection from women, even after they thought they had moved on from being an incel. This means that departing from incel is more complex than simply entering into a romantic relationship with a woman. Others, who still identified as incel, said that they embrace the blackpill because it prevents them from wasting time (being concerned about women) and they can engage in what they deem more productive activities:

> I like the blackpill because it made me more analytical and since it made my interest towards women shrink I have also more times for my hobbies and self-improvement. (Mike)

There is no consensus amongst incels or even ex-incels, as to whether the blackpill has a positive or negative impact upon their lives. There are those who extol the philosophy and claim that accepting it has made them happier (though not happy per se) and improved their lives, whilst others acknowledge the damage it has had upon their mental health (yet still embrace it). What is evident though are the increased effects on younger men:

> I have to say that the blackpill is usually always detrimental to the very young (under 20 years old). The younger you get the blackpill the more damage you'll get from it and very few benefits compared to the damage received. (John)

Mental Health

Mental health questions to polls on incels.co provide insight into the incel experience, with many incels reporting feeling profound dissatisfaction and unhappiness with their lives. In total, 77% of respondents said they are not optimistic about their future. Similarly, 88% of respondents reported that they are unhappy. Furthermore, 95% of respondents said that they find the blackpill ideology to be an accurate reflection of their reality, demonstrating that the pessimism and self-loathing associated with the blackpill is core to incel culture.

The majority of respondents also reported suffering from psychiatric disorders, like depression and anxiety. In fact, 67% of respondents said they experience long-lasting depression. Even when full-blown depression is not an issue, an outsized percentage of respondents, 74% – say they experience anxiety, stress or emotional distress 'in a constant manner', which means that just 26% of respondents consider themselves free from a significant psychological impairment or struggle.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, contemplation and discussion of suicide features prominently on incel forums, and functions in tandem with the pervasive blackpill. As many incels believe they are doomed to a life of unhappiness and celibacy,

they consider suicide a legitimate and viable alternative. In a 2019 incels.co poll, a full 68% of respondents said they have considered suicide in a serious manner.

Suicide, ultimately, affects men more than women. In England and Wales, official figures show that the suicide rate for men in 2019 was the highest for two decades. The Office for National Statistics (ONS) found that men accounted for approximately three-quarters of the 5,691 suicide deaths registered in 2019 – 4,303 compared with 1,388 women.[13] This means the male suicide rate of 16.9 deaths per 100,000 in England and Wales was the highest since 2000. Men aged 45–49 remain at the highest risk of suicide; however, suicide is the single biggest killer of men under the age of 45. These are trends that occur in many other countries. Compared to women, men are three times more likely to die by suicide in Australia, 3.5 times more likely in the United States and more than four times more likely in Russia and Argentina.[14] Suicide is an immensely complex and nuanced issue. In the United States, adult women attempt suicide 1.2 times as often as men; however, men are more likely to use more violent methods of attempting suicide, meaning that intervention is unlikely. This could also indicate that men have higher levels of suicidal intent than women.

Seeking support, however, from mental health professionals such as psychologists or psychotherapists is actively discouraged by incels, because they are seen to minimise external factors such as the value of looks and money in society and overvalue internal factors such as self-improvement. In fact, psychologists were even described as blatantly lying, which would completely negate their ability to assist people in overcoming their problems. Psychologists are also considered by incels to be mainly women and so would automatically be inaccessible to them, especially as they believe that men's problems cannot be understood by women.

In the interviews, childhood experiences were emphasised as important in paving the future path to inceldom. Participants spoke about how problems such as bullying in schools and overuse of digital technologies lead to mental health and self-esteem issues, which often go unaddressed in men. For Mike, though, fearing his intimidating stepfather impacted upon his confidence and self-esteem and ultimately his ability to interact with women. To Mike, the stepfather embodied the hegemonic alpha male, whilst he was unable to satisfy that role as a child, which then influenced his perceived subordinate adult identity.

Conclusions

The incel rebellion, in reality, is not a homogeneous organised dissention; however, the incelsphere involves a cacophony of online voices outraged at shared perceived injustices arising from women and a society that supposedly enables them to harm men. It provides outlets for aggrieved men to divulge their fantasies

[13]https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/birthsdeathsandmarriages/deaths/bulletins/suicidesintheunitedkingdom/2019registrations

[14]https://www.bbc.com/future/article/20190313-why-more-men-kill-themselves-than-women

and darkest thoughts, fuelled by bitterness and resentment. As such, no coordinated or systematic mobilisation or recruitment is required. The mere existence and appeal of the community is enough in itself to inveigle young, often vulnerable and impressionable, men to inceldom and to begin engaging with the blackpill beliefs. Such men have often experienced romantic rejection, which has deeply affected them, perhaps more so than other people might react. This vivid response could be due to a sense of entitlement, a belief that they are owed a girlfriend/sexual partner, due to being a man or what society has promised them. The blackpill ideologies, therefore, present appealing explanations for the loneliness and self-loathing that has ensued from their being rejected or inability to interact with women. The novel language creates a unified sense of community that obstructs outsiders and further perpetuates misogyny, racism, homophobia and ableism. The world view of incel is not unique however, and there is validation for the philosophies, found elsewhere in the manosphere, from uncritical interpretations of 'scientific' studies, as well as mainstream society and popular culture.

This page intentionally left blank

Chapter 4

Weirdos or Extremists?

> Just killed a woman, feeling good. (TommyInnit)

TommyInnit is a popular YouTuber who plays Minecraft. In May 2021, TommyInnit, who is 17, had 8.7 million subscribers, a number which continues to grow exponentially. Minecraft's average user demographic is 15- to 21-year-olds,[1] although the game is suitable from age three years. The natural progression from playing Minecraft as a young child is to engage with YouTubers and learn about modifications for the game and to be part of the gaming community where derogatory language about women and minority groups is used in abundance. TommyInnit's catchphrase, however, is just one example of normalised male violence towards women in popular discourse, which is not confined to the online realm and is far more widespread than incels.

Utilising analyses of research data underpinned by the sociology of deviance, subcultural, gender and feminist theory, this chapter explores the lure of the manosphere and the appeal of rejecting progressive social values. Incels have been increasingly described as extremists, which has far-reaching connotations in how they are responded to, and so it is important to critically analyse the accuracy of this application. The chapter considers how rudimentary incel beliefs are enactments of male supremacy, which some but not all individuals in incel communities can and indeed do internalise and become fanatical about. Pathologising groups such as incels as 'deviant others', distinct from 'ordinary men', is problematic as it suggests that explicit sexism is confined to these small groups rather than being symbolic of wider societal perspectives and behaviours. Although the hatred of women espoused by incels is acute, their attitudes are actually symptomatic of structural misogyny, further emboldened by the precarious and increasingly right-wing Western political climate, a manifestation of what bell hooks (2013) refers to as 'the imperialist white supremacist capitalist patriarchy'.

[1]https://minecraft-seeds.net/blog/minecraft-player-demographics/

The Incel Rebellion: The Rise of the Manosphere and the Virtual War Against Women, 69–95
Copyright © Lisa Sugiura 2021 Published by Emerald Publishing Limited.

This work is published under the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY 4.0) licence. Anyone may reproduce, distribute, translate and create derivative works of this work (for both commercial and non-commercial purposes), subject to full attribution to the original publication and authors. The full terms of this licence may be seen at http://creativecommons.org/licences/by/4.0/legalcode

All rights of reproduction in any form reserved
doi:10.1108/978-1-83982-254-420211007

The parallels with the alt- and far right are considered, in particular how both groups camouflage their extremist behaviours as satire to ensure that those who are offended are not privy to the 'in-jokes'. Even if the intention is not to cause harm (although this can be called into question), how the messages are being perceived, and the outcomes and impact in enabling misogyny and encouraging violent behaviours, cannot be denied. Algorithms, memes and echo chambers further promote and reinforce the ideologies, with limited intervention from social media companies. Employing some of the high-profile cases of incel violence, this chapter then considers how, irrespective of recent media attention, incels and groups in the wider manosphere were able to fly under the radar for so long, avoiding exposure in the mainstream discourse. Here the affordances of digital technologies, combined with reluctance to tackle misogyny and recognise its severity, are significant. I consider the links with domestic violence and terrorism as well as the issue of copycat attacks, and whether mass incel killings are comparable with school shootings. This chapter will address why certain forms of extremism and extremist behaviours invoke 'lone wolf' descriptions or explanations associated with mental health instead before turning to the responses that have been employed to tackle the expanding incel threat, some of which may be actually exacerbating the problem.

Subterranean Values and the Appeal of the Manosphere

Incels have been described as a subculture (O'Malley et al., 2020). Subcultures perform in ways that oppose the dominant culture or reject wider societal values (Wolfgang, Ferracuti, & Mannheim, 1967; Young, 2011). Sarah Thornton's work on *Club Cultures* (1995) is useful to link subcultural theory with incels as it is not concerned with dominant ideologies and subversive subcultures, rather the focus is on the subcultural ideologies. Incels are not a subversive subculture fighting back at a dominant ideology, regardless of how much they may attempt to assume that identity. At the core their ideology is not separate or unique from perspectives continuing to permeate wider society, but it is an overtly extreme manifestation of misogynistic, homophobic, racist, classist and ableist ideas and beliefs, which is also prevalent in the mainstream. Within subcultural communities, members become imbued within deviant norms, attitudes and values that liberate them from traditional constraints on their behaviour. Hence, incels engage in explicitly heinous discussions and utilise outrageous language denigrating women, ethnic minorities, the LGBTQI+ community and even themselves. This special language establishes their attachment to the incel ideology and determines the parameters of the community and who is welcome within it (Hamm, 2002; Holt, 2010).

Incels, and indeed other groups within the manosphere, define themselves against an imagined mainstream, one that they perceive to be anti-men, but which in reality, covertly provides support and validation for them. Therefore, the discourses of incels are ideologies that fulfil their particular cultural agendas (Thornton, 1995). These subcultural ideologies enable incels to envisage their own and other social groups, maintain their unique characteristics and insider status within the community. As such, this research is not just predicated on what incels believe

but also explores what Thompson (1990, p. 7) refers to as 'meaning in the service of power', recognising that incels do assert authority and assume the inferiority of others in some instances, particularly in the application of the blackpill. This knowledge provides strength, a feeling of superiority over those who are either too ignorant or doltish to appreciate what incels believe and, to them, establish the facts of how the (Western) world operates. This enables them to cope with all the hardship they endure from not being born attractive, as well as from how wider society now does perceive them in light of their increased negative public attention.

Incels are subject to labelling, within the media they have been referred to and portrayed as figures of ridicule – losers and pathetic virgins, deviants, weirdos, misogynists, extremists and terrorists. Some of these labels such as being losers and sexually inexperienced are already internalised, whilst others, especially the terrorist label, are actively rejected. For individuals who had already thought they were hated, being the current 'folk devil' (Cohen, 1972) of choice, means that what might have been paranoia is now substantiated. Subcultures have developed to mitigate and obtain solidarity against stigmatisation (Braithwaite, 1989). Individuals already in a situation where they feel society has rejected them are then ostracised further. Although the original perception of rejection is a subjective interpretation given credence by the blackpill ideology, incels as a community are now homogenised and demonised, such that the term incel is almost the default for misogynist, overlooking how misogyny is pervasive in society and not confined to these individuals. Proclamations of perpetrators being incels are also utilised in the immediate aftermath of lone terror attacks, when there is no evidence to support it at that juncture. Those who are committing these disgusting atrocities fundamentally do need to be called what they are – terrorists, murderers, sociopaths, etc.; however, the risk of labelling others who, although aligned with undeniably problematic perspectives, have not displayed any such behaviours nor are working towards committing any atrocities is that a self-fulfilling prophecy (Merton, 1948) could be inadvertently encouraged. The problem is that it is not obvious, which individuals are travelling down that path, particularly amongst the cacophony of bile and hatred present within the community. Irrespective of whether it is performed for each other, the influence of being absorbed by the blackpill mindset upon different individuals and how they might react to it, and the goading of their incel peers, is subject to interpretation, which in some cases could be to lash out violently.

As noted, younger men appear to be more susceptible to the lure of the incel ideology, although the incel community is not exclusively constituted of young men. Criminological theory provides insight into younger men's engagement with and identification of incel. Matza's (1964) functionalist perspective on subcultures, 'state of drift', assumes everyone shares the same delinquent values, which lead some people to engage in criminal or deviant behaviour; however, most people are able to suppress these principles most of the time. These values are understood as subterranean 'underground' values. This ability to restrain oneself, though, is a learned skill; therefore, we are more likely to participate in criminality or deviance when young and less so as we age and assume more responsibilities. Therefore, people are neither conformist nor deviant and, according to

Matza (1964), are able to drift between both throughout their lives. A glimmer of hope in the otherwise fatalistic world of incel is the potential for ascension, to leave the life of loneliness behind. Applying Matza's state of drift concept, just like delinquency, inceldom is a phase, something that young men identify with as part of their engagement with digital culture but can grow out of. Although there is currently limited data on how many men do leave the incel community behind, the indication is that being an incel is not a permanent state, which is another contradiction of the blackpill, in claiming immutability. Further, it is unclear if the impact of being immersed in incel culture can be completely eliminated or whether certain aspects end up being so deeply ingrained that even though ex-incels might learn to outwardly treat women with respect, internally they still maintain derision for them. This sadly seemed to be the case with some of those ex-incels, I spoke with who still retained sexist assumptions of female privilege, in what they termed a 'pussy pass'. The treating of women with respect might also be the outcome of realising that this is how they will be able to get what they want, that is, sexual/romantic relationships with women, and so ultimately these men end up conforming to the very 'cucked' behaviours that they previously claimed they despised.

Without dismissing the issues arising from the involvement with the community and indeed the influence of the blackpill upon how women and progressiveness are perceived, being an incel might be a passing chapter, a foray into a subculture, which young persons have historically been associated with and that in turn have prompted societal concerns (Pearson, 1983). Goldsmith and Brewer (2015) proposed the concept of digital drift to account for youth offending, which extended elements of Matza's original theories to the virtual sphere. They suggest that access to and use of digital technologies for interaction subjects individuals to environments where prosocial influences are disregarded. Young people are able to engage with new identities due to the relative absence of capable guardians to present different perspectives. Goldsmith and Brewer (2015) also highlight how online anonymity liberates individuals from a sense of responsibility and could encourage people to act in ways they would not otherwise, offline (Suler, 2005). Settings such as online gaming, chats, forums, etc. provides escapism and minimises the need to conform to social norms and values. The power of traditional authorities is diminished in digital environments, allowing the emergence of transgressive influences that enable deviance (Bishop, 2013; Hinduja, 2008). Therefore, Goldsmith and Brewer's iteration of Matza's original concept can be applied to consider how young men can be drawn into and escalate hatred against women as a result of participation in virtual incel communities. Subterranean values are demonstrated in how people draw on neutralisation techniques (Sykes & Matza, 1957) to offset their wrong doings. If people held different values, when engaging in crime or deviance, they would not feel any guilt and would instead believe their behaviour to be correct. Instead, people do turn to justifications to legitimise their actions or remove their responsibility in relation to mainstream values. Incels are no different, in using different techniques of neutralisation; the implication is that they understand and share some societal values, despite often presenting themselves as having shunned them.

Extremist and Deviant Others

A notoriously contested concept, 'extremism', typically refers to beliefs or behaviours sharing three characteristics: ambitions for radical social, political or other transformations; scepticism towards the efficacy of 'normal' channels for the satisfaction of those ambitions; and the positing of fundamental difference between an 'us' and 'them'. The meaning of 'extremism' derives from other concepts, identities and practices. Designating individuals, groups or behaviours as 'extremist' explicitly or implicitly relies upon (and, in turn, reproduces) the identification of non-extremist individuals, groups and behaviours. Extremism also cumulates some of its meaning from adjacent concepts like terrorism, radicalisation and violence, which address similar or overlapping phenomena. Likewise, the combination of the term with adjectives such as 'violent' or 'hateful' shifts its meaning and emphasis.

In Berger's (2018) framing, extremism can be characterised as a belief that in-groups can never be healthy or secure unless they engage in hostile actions against outgroups. I recognise the ontological instability of the term 'extremism'. As with related terms in the political violence lexicon like 'terrorism', the meaning of extremism is variable such that its designation in one geographical or temporal context differs markedly from another. The meaning of extremism is also fluid, making it contestable in specific online or offline contexts. In fact, behaviours considered acceptable at specific moments may later qualify as acts of extremism.

Following incel-related mass murders, incel is now inextricably linked with extremist behaviours. The Institute for Research on Male Supremacism (IRMS), however, has published recommendations for media reporting on incels,[2] in response to media coverage that has engaged in, what Jock Young (1971) famously described as, 'deviance amplification', which in heightening the social reaction increases the deviance itself. Media outlets such as the BBC, CNN and the *New York Times* have been criticised for portraying incels as something distinct and ominous from wider society. Much of these pieces address the misogynistic angle of incel, but the IRMS states that this is undertaken without making the connection with male supremacist ideology, which means that those who are misogynist, in having their reasons for hating women magnified, that is, women won't have sex with them, are able to elicit sympathy and support for their adoption of the victim status. Tomkinson et al. (2020) describe how the media reporting on incels, which publicly affirms feelings of victimhood or persecution amongst men, undermines any political action on gender-based violence, as well as encouraging those who feel persecuted to engage in violence. Media reporting, which includes incel's own narratives, emphasises and legitimises the channels available for other disillusioned young men to join them. The realisation that allowing the voices of individual incels to be heard, further enabling a platform for their potentially extremist and warped perspectives, is a tension that I have grappled with in this research. After all, these are not especially marginalised (though they would disagree) individuals who are ordinarily silenced; however, I felt it was important to

[2]https://www.malesupremacism.org/tips-for-media/

not just undertake external observations of the communities and to have direct engagement with people who would enable me to have a richer understanding of the incel dynamics, without becoming unduly sympathetic to them.

The IRMS acknowledges that there is incel identity distinct from the misogynistic incel ideology and violence. Here women, men and non-binary people are noted as being able to identify as incels who do not have world views rooted in deep misogyny. Theirs is a different interpretation of the many studies incorporating the blackpill, one which does not apportion blame onto women, feminism or progression. Those incel men who are misogynist and who do dehumanise women and glorify violence should be distinguished in media reporting. The IRMS suggests clarification is needed when reporting on particular forums and spaces and making the distinction between general incel communities and misogynistic incel forums, particularly if the latter excludes women. In previous research analysing the misogynistic discourse on the now defunct r/incels (Tranchese & Sugiura, 2021), women were often excluded from conversation. This could create a false impression that because women were not experiencing direct abuse in these and other environments, the misogyny has little impact. Instead, discussions such as these, which were or are publicly available, highlight how misogyny is sustained and demonstrates the commonalities between the narratives and reasons espoused by incels with other forms of online and offline men's violence against women. Online abuse, like offline violence, happens on a continuum (Kelly, 1987). This gamut does not merely range from unpleasant, sporadic, non-threatening (direct or indirect) messages to frequent, highly threatening, hateful content (Lewis et al., 2017, p. 1469), but it also involves misogynistic discourse and practices considered non-criminal or non-threatening because they are seen as 'fiction', as satire/cultural in-jokes (Zillmann, 1983) or because they do not entail a direct interaction between users. Detaching 'exceptional behaviour' from the continuum shields more mundane forms of misogyny from scrutiny. Incels with their deliberately ridiculous and exaggerated misogyny can be used as a distraction from the more subtle forms of misogyny that is pervasive in society.

Separating 'extreme' versions of an ideology from more 'mundane' ones creates an artificial dichotomy between the deviant fringe and mainstream ideologies that, in actuality, are based on the same assumptions. The extreme/non-extreme distinction is deceptive, since it obscures systems of oppression and 'everyday' misogyny – particularly online, where such boundaries can be harder to differentiate – that have become socially sanctioned and normalised. Moreover, this arbitrary division absolves the 'non-misogynistic' majority as it is allowed to express reprimand for and rejection of 'extreme' misogyny, whilst presenting itself as morally irreprehensible (Ferber, 1996). Hence, incels can be othered from 'normal' men, such that incel has been conflated with all forms of misogyny to the extent that it is almost representative of all misogyny and male supremacy. Domestic terror attacks are labelled incel regardless of the perpetrator being connected to these communities or ideology. Viewing misogyny as exclusive to incels obscures the broader violent nature of heteropatriarchy and misogyny that are the very real lived experiences of many women. Incel is but one component of the larger male supremacist movement.

Incel misogyny is often seen as an issue of a secluded online group of deviant individuals, whose problematic attitudes towards women are exclusively attributed to their 'weird' personalities, as individual deviance or mental illness, and without affiliation with structural misogyny or patriarchal socialisation systems (Manne, 2018). In this sense, incel is conceptualised in a manner similar to rapists: deviant men who engage in 'extreme' acts of misogyny because of their individual pathology (Malamuth, 1981). This approach to understanding incels neglects to consider the prevalence of misogyny pervasive in wider society, and the role it plays in influencing and reinforcing incel's attitudes towards women.

The Right and Incels

Commentators and academics (Beauchamp, 2019; Nagle, 2017; Ribeiro et al., 2020; Stokel-Walker, 2021; Young, 2019) have drawn comparisons with incels and the alt-right and certainly there is overlap in terms of their shared heteropatriarchal attitudes towards women and women's rights. The alt-right is notoriously aligned with racism rather than hating women; however, misogyny intermingles comfortably with racial prejudice. The alt-right rose to prominence in the wake of Trump's campaign and election, placing far right ideologies firmly in the mainstream. Like incels, alt-right groups mobilise the internet through the use of social media, trolling and use culturally specific language and memes – included shared words such as 'cuck' and images like Pepe the Frog. The use of such language and memes creates a universality across groups and the internet, where words and images are representative of shared meanings and beliefs.

The Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC, n.d.) defines the alt-right as

> a set of far-right ideologies, groups and individuals whose core belief is that 'white identity' is under attack by multicultural forces using 'political correctness and social justice' to undermine white people and 'their' civilization.

Aaron Winter (2019) calls attention to the contested nature of the term alt-right, and how in using this more palatable yet novel and edgy terms, it attempts to camouflage the racism, white nationalism, white supremacism and fascism associated with the traditional far right and appeals to the usually politically apathetic youth. Distinct from previous far right movements, the alt-right exists principally on social media, on the same platforms as incels – Twitter, Reddit, 4chan, etc. – and also comprises of relatively anonymous youths (Hawley, 2018).

There is also a nexus between incel ideology and other alt-right ideologies, such as being anti-liberal, anti-leftist, anti-feminism, and that Western civilisation is in decline, hence the desire to preserve/return to traditional values aka abolishing much of the equality rights benefitting women and marginalised groups. This is linked with redpilling and Men's Rights Activists (MRAs) within the manosphere, where one is awakened to delusions of contemporary society. Also, much of the incel online discussions involves a not so insignificant amount of racism. However, for the most part, incels claim not to be politically motivated insofar as

there are incels who are both right and left leaning or even apolitical, and having specific political beliefs is not necessarily a main driver for becoming an incel in the first place:

> It's a common misconception that all incels are alt-right. Incels can be anywhere on the political spectrum. I don't know why there is a supposed connection to it. That part doesn't make sense. (Ben)

However, a different perspective is provided by a former incel, who describes incel forums as a type of gateway to the alt-right:

> These communities surely overlap. I think that incel forums are a gate to the alt-right. Not every incel of course becomes an alt-right supporter, but many do. They overlap in the sense that many incels become alt-right supporters so both groups have many members in common. (John)

Despite, incels not necessarily being a political movement, given the positioning of blackpill philosophies that are undeniably right wing, convergence between incels and conservatism is justifiable, particularly when incels criticise policies which they view as adopting the 'feminine imperative' – that is, treating women as autonomous human beings worthy of having equal rights to men. For example, the term 'cuckservative' appears in various threads, which according to the incel wiki means a man who advocates progressive social policies or a conservative who adopts leftist or pro-racial-diversity policy. There are also certainly politically motivated or aligned opinions and discussions prevalent within the community, such as women's and men's rights, and the treatment of women and men in the criminal justice system and family courts. For feminists, the direct vitriol they receive about their gains for women could not be perceived as anything less than political, after all as Carol Hanisch (1969) astutely observed 'the personal is political'.

Although some incels have actively rejected or resent any affiliation with the alt-right, the political connotations arising from the incel ideology are inescapable as are the undeniable parallels with the desire to return to traditional values as outlined in Chapter 2 in regard to the fetishising of trad-wives. However, incel ideology is rooted more in male supremacy rather than the white supremacy of the alt-right. Incels certainly internalise racism and recognise white privilege, though often they frame it in terms of attractiveness rather than recognising the systemic social benefits emanating from being born with white skin:

> Many non-white incels have also faced racism in dating (partly due to which they became incels). For e.g. many (South and East) Asian incels have struggled with dating partly because of their image in western society, and also that even many of their own women are self-hating who worship white guys. (Mike)

> Many non-white incels feel they themselves are subhuman partly because of their race too, and wish they were white, kinda like internalised racism. (Sam)

However, one non-white interviewee, indicated that incels who are white, may have white supremacist connections due to the ideological overlap with the alt-right.

> Incel ideology, i.e. the black pill is a part of alt-right itself, although many incels themselves may, or may not be actively alt right (depending on their race). Although many incels are white supremacists, there are many non-white incels too, who combined with the other issues, also may have faced racism while growing up if they grew up in a western country. So blackpill in itself isn't directly related to white supremacy, but a growing number of white incels are white supremacists. (Alex)

The misconception is that all incels are white supremacists, yet many incels are not white. This is not to say that non-white persons can't be affiliated with alt-right ideology but would be precluded from white supremacist groups due to the core identity inherently within them. In addition, because of the overlap in incel and alt-right ideologies, being a member of the incel community could be viewed as a passage to the alt-right and white supremacy. However, the IRMS states that male supremacism should be recognised as a threat in its own right, not only as a conduit to other harmful ideologies. Although there is undeniable cross-pollination of ideas between male supremacism and white supremacism, misogyny is not simply a gateway to white supremacism and other aspects of the alt-right, which media outlets such as Vox and *The Atlantic* have claimed. Meanwhile, Jaki et al. (2019) found that incels are not mostly 'white right-wing conservatives' as assumed by the media but are actually a much more heterogeneous group. Jaki et al. (2019) stated that the forums full of incitement and violent fantasies could be no more than verbal tactics for self-enhancement within an online echo chamber.

Hiding in Plain Sight – the Power of Memes and 'Satire'

An 'echo chamber' is an environment where individuals will only encounter opinions or information that reflect and reinforce their established beliefs. Echo chambers can create misinformation and warp a person's viewpoint so that they struggle to consider alternate perspectives. This is exacerbated by confirmation bias (Wason, 1968), where a person will prefer information that reinforces their existing beliefs. Echo chambers can occur in any space where information is exchanged, but the nature of the internet lends itself to creating digital spaces with only like-minded individuals. Companies such as Facebook and Google enable *Filter Bubbles*, spaces of intellectual isolation based on algorithms of former search histories, click behaviours and location information. This results in limited topics and perspectives being presented, leaving narrow bubbles of formulated interests and personalised search subjects (DiFranzo & Gloria-Garcia, 2017;

Pariser, 2011). Research from Bright (2018) and Pariser (2011) demonstrates that filter bubble algorithms are shutting off new ideas, subjects and significant information, resulting in many people not accessing knowledge outside of their own political, religious or societal views. Incel forums and websites create these digital echo chambers which reinforce and amplify their world view, including potentially extremist perspectives – enabling the radicalisation of this community of lonely dateless men (Bael et al., 2019; Jaki et al., 2019; Zimmerman et al., 2018):

> I don't think that violence is the solution, because it won't solve anything, but I can understand the psychology behind their violence. Incel sites are echo chambers of negative thoughts, so just by reading the threads and posts you get more negative day by day. You don't even realise that because the changes are slow and constant so that it seems normal to you to be like this, to be this negative. (Carl)

> These kind of echo chambers are especially very harmful to those who already have psychiatric problems like ER and AM because people with psychiatric problems, especially with aspergers, tend to obsess on some things or thoughts. But not all incel terrorists were mentally ill before they discovered the blackpill. Some became mentally ill after taking the blackpill and staying in those echo chambers every day. (Tom)

Within these spaces, there is an insular trolling sensibility, whereby such platforms are not suitable for those easily offended yet are easily accessible and available for public consumption. Through the use of humour, the cultural taboo of racism, homophobia, sexism and ableism is subverted (Reitman, 2018). Memes often appear as comical images; however they facilitate the spread of ideology in masking discriminatory messages as harmless satire or parody. Nagle (2017) describes this as a countercultural irony tactic, generally employed by far right movements to use edgy humour to mask the loaded racism in their messaging, to open the 'Overton window' – expanding the public conception of what is acceptable discourse (Wendling, 2018, p. 91). According to Crawford (2020), the gradual and increased exposure of users to ironic parody obscuring hostile content may mobilise the impact of extreme ideology. This exposure may function from the bottom-up as users seek out progressively extreme content for themselves, be an outcome from the algorithmic nature of platforms that recommend or provide new content based on what has been engaged with previously, such as YouTube's *up next* and *suggested for you* features, or it may be part of a top-down approach where 'meme campaigns' are disseminated to attract new users (Crawford, 2020).

According to Milner (2013), out-groups are continually othered via the distribution of stereotypes. Certainly, stereotypes play a significant role in the success of memes as they facilitate a shared cultural assumption about different groups. Pre-existing cultural narratives allow for the inclusion of pithy new catchphrases to enable successful memetic reproduction, because the facets of intertextuality

are aimed at the ingroup who are already familiar with the tropes. Hence, memes are effective in communicating the logic of populist messaging and providing more rhetoric to besmirch the outgroup.

It is not just alt-right groups that utilise memes with underlying abusive and misogynistic connotations. The dirtbag left, also pejoratively referred to as the *Bernie Bros*, are known as privileged white male Bernie Sanders supporters, consolidated around a disparate group of left-wing media outlets – most notably the *Chapo Trap House* podcast, which employs harsh and cruel humour as an intentional political tactic to villainise the outgroup – those who do not support Sanders (Beauchamp, 2020). The deployment of memes endorses the dirtbag left's reputation as an anti-establishment social movement, increasing the group's appeal to younger people familiar with internet culture and humour.

Kingdon (2020) emphasises how the common defence of 'it was just a joke' is commonly employed to justify the sharing of, or commenting on, a meme that could otherwise be deemed discriminatory, thereby using humour to excuse taking responsibility or feeling remorse. Such excuses means that further audiences could be persuaded the imagery is an innocuous joke and not recognise the underlying bigoted content. The humour concealing the discrimination within memes can produce a sense of moral impunity, where users are able to engage with the underlying ideology, whilst simultaneously mocking outsiders who take the content seriously; hence, this is a mechanism favoured by incels. Thus, these memes and other forms of 'satirical' posts benefit from the innate ambiguity of online interactions, as outlined in Poe's Law,[3] creating what Milner (2013) has termed a 'Logic of Lulz' where it is never possible to discern the intended tone of an online post with any certainty. As such, all participants of an online space are perpetually vulnerable to trolling. This way, extreme views are allowed to thrive enriched by a surrounding culture of troll sensibility, vagueness and in-group cohesion, sustained by the perception of anonymity.

The online disinhibition effect refers to how anonymity, whether real or imagined, may allow people to explore their identities, and to act without fear of being held to account for their behaviour, in a realm where responsibilities, norms and social restrictions may not apply (Suler, 2005, pp. 321–326). Suler (2005) studied behaviours in online chat rooms, noting that people tended to display greater anger and aggression in cyberspace than they did offline, which he argued was because the protective factor of hiding behind a screen brings with it a perceived anonymity allowing them to act without fear of reprisals 'when protected by a screen, people across a broader spectrum of violence and abuse that are

[3]Poe's Law is derived from internet culture which states that without a clear indicator of the author's intention, it is impossible to create a parody of extreme views such that it cannot be mistaken by some people as a sincere expression of the views being parodied. The original statement by Nathan Poe in 2005 read: 'without a winking smiley or other blatant display of humor, it is utterly impossible to parody a Creationist in such a way that *someone* won't mistake for the genuine article. ¯_(ツ)_/¯'.

perpetrated through cultural feel that real-world social restrictions, responsibilities and norms don't apply' (pp. 321–326).

Jane (2014, p. 4) describes trolling on the internet as 'e-bile', pointing to the often graphic and sexualised violent context of it, the purpose of which is to 'outshout everyone else'. Women are more likely to be the recipients and less likely to be the authors of 'e-bile' and report the impacts of e-bile as distressing and anxiety provoking (Jane, 2014). In extreme cases of e-bile, female targets have not only removed themselves from online engagement but from the offline public sphere as well (Jane, 2014), which demonstrates the new forms of excluding women's voices.

The lens of geek masculinity has been used to theorise the silencing of women as an outcome of online misogyny (Massanari, 2017). Geek masculinity is visible in the actions of men who brandish their digital culture and unique vernacular knowledge, by creating and sustaining online groups that thrive on male-centric sources inaccessible to wider audiences. With geek masculinity, there is both a sense of subordination and persecution and dominant masculinity, because, on the one hand, geeks are usually outsiders and nerds, whilst on the other hand, there is a belligerent adoption of masculine stereotypes and over sexism (Salter & Blodgett, 2012). In the example of Gamergate, the violent, sexualised abuse of women was deemed reasonable and justified by the Gamergaters who had adopted a position of ethical superiority.

Not for Normies

Incels post content that is intentionally extreme, using shocking language and imagery, claiming it is ironic, internet humour, such that they can respond to the accusations of them promoting hatred with dismissals that outsider others have failed to get the joke or appreciate the irony. Amongst the postings of the studies and 'scientific evidence' of which the blackpill is comprised, manipulated to support misogynist commentary, for example, are outlandish falsehoods exaggerated by incels that are interspersed amongst the doctrines incels do believe. An example of this is the dogpill, the ridiculous proposition that rather than have sex with them, women are having sex with their pet dogs. The dogpill is not part of the blackpill, and it is ambiguous as to whether it is a genuine incel philosophy or a tool designed to deliberately provoke and amass outraged reaction. There is belief amongst the incel community that women prefer animals to them, and there is commentary about women's online profile pictures that feature them with their dogs rather than male partners; therefore, the preposterous extension of this is to claim that these women are then engaging in bestiality, to potentially invoke the greatest reactions both internally within the community and externally from the 'normies'.

Similar to other online trolls who deny any harms arising from their abusive comments by alleging it wasn't their intention to cause harm, incels attempt to distance themselves from the repercussions of their words and content by refuting the seriousness of them. As per Sykes and Matza's (1957) techniques of neutralization, Irony is a way to deny responsibility for what is being said, thus removing them from any harms caused. However, whilst Sykes and Matza's original concept explained how offenders absolved themselves of any guilt relating to harms arising from their actions, in the case of incels, they are not necessarily experiencing

guilt which they are looking to offset through dressing their abusive comments up as humour. Moreover, they either do not recognise the harm in what they are doing, are too consumed with their own pain and may be lashing out or are using what Scott and Lyman (1968) would call excuses to justify their discrimination instead. To further complicate matters, discrimination is sometimes unrecognised, especially in regard to gender, and so denying the oppression of women is another reason to engage in misogynistic behaviour.

Incels are able to reconcile their support of mass murderers and comments of going ER with not being violent, with claims that they do not mean it, they do not actually want to commit violent acts nor encourage others to do so or these posts were not made seriously. Yet, this undermines the normalisation of violence against women and symbolises that it is acceptable to discuss it in positive terms. Incels may well think that they are being humorous, whilst completely disregarding the societal impacts. Additionally, they aren't immune to the harms that engaging in this unhealthy way causes, further perpetuating the mental health issues, loneliness and isolation.

Incel Attacks and Their Legacies

Academics at University of Western Australia (UWA) found that incels have been linked to the killings of at least 50 people and injured at least 58 more since 2014 – statistics comparable to the number of victims of Islamic extremism in the same period (Tomkinson et al., 2020). In order to further consider the incel threat, this chapter now turns to the high-profile mass killings conducted by individuals who identified as incel or who were associated with the incel community or ideology. However, before addressing those incidents, another case will be discussed that predates the contemporary incel community yet foreshadows the same misogynistic fuelled violence. In naming all of these killers, I am conscious that I am further enabling the notoriety they craved in conducting their heinous attacks; this is difficult to reconcile but necessary to explore the association between incels and physical acts of violence. Although I appreciate that I have already centred some of the infamous murderers in earlier discussions within this book, here, in each case, all the names of the victims that died will be presented first, I want to ensure that they are not forgotten, and it is their memories that I want to respect not those of violent misogynists.

Geneviève Bergeron, Hélène Colgan, Nathalie Croteau, Barbara Daigneault, Anne-Marie Edward, Maud Haviernick, Barbara Klucznik-Widajewicz, Maryse Laganière, Maryse Leclair, Anne-Marie Lemay, Sonia Pelletier, Michèle Richard, Annie St-Arneault, Annie Turcotte

On 6 December 1989, Marc Lepine walked into a classroom in Montreal's Ecole Polytechnique engineering school armed with a semi-automatic rifle and sent the 50 men and 9 women within there to opposite sides of the room. Lepine had previously been denied admission to the Polytechnique and was upset about women working in positions traditionally occupied by men. He ordered the men to leave and told the remaining women that they were there because he hated feminists

and opened fire, killing six female students instantly and leaving three injured. Lepine then specifically targeted more women to shoot, whilst moving through the college corridors, cafeteria and another classroom. Eventually, he turned the gun on himself, but not before a total of 14 women were dead, another 10 women injured, and four men had been hurt unintentionally in the crossfire.

After the attack, police found Lepine's suicide note, which included his clear motivations: (translated from French) 'Feminists have always enraged me', he wrote. 'I have decided to send the feminists, who have always ruined my life, to their Maker'. The note also included a list of 19 accomplished women who he claimed would have been killed if not for a lack of time. Reponses after the killings included psychologists pathologising Lepine as a madman, or as 'innocent as his victims, and himself a victim of an increasingly merciless society' (La Presse). Note that this moment in time coincided with the significant growth of men's rights groups discussed in Chapter 2; however, the misogynistic motive behind Lepine's actions was originally deemed too political for public knowledge. The police were also concerned about going public with the suicide note in case it inspired copycat killings. At the time of the massacre, feminism was achieving great gains in Canada and especially Quebec, in relation to the pro-choice movement[4]; however, Lepine's mindset was not an anomaly; there was an underlying and increasing resentment from men towards feminists as a result. The attack had the effect of silencing many feminists for fear of further reprisals and instilling guilt in women for the deaths of their female sisters, furthering the goals of Lepine and anti-feminism. Despite the fact that misogyny continues to prevail in Canada, with a woman or girl killed every 2.5 days,[5] there is an unwillingness to address the issue of men's violence against women and recognise it as an act of hatred, as highlighted by its glaring omission during the 2019 federal election. Canada is also home to many self-identified incels as well as the site of major incel-related attacks, which will be discussed in more detail below.

The same forms of antifeminism endure today, and these perspectives are not an end in themselves but could, and indeed do, lead to the most extreme and violent forms of hatred coming to fruition, as the all-too-real cases evidence. The difference is the advances in digital technologies that fuel and shape these ideologies and assist the planning and implementation and legacy of attacks.

Christopher Michaels-Martinez, Veronika Weiss, Katie Cooper, Cheng-Yuan Hong, George Chen, Weihan Wang

On 23 May 2014, Elliot Rodger (ER) conducted what is probably the most high-profile incel-related attack in Isla Vista, California; indeed, it is the case that first drew

---

[4] *Tremblay* v *Daigle* [1989] 2 S.C.R. 530 A Quebec woman named Chantale Daigle had been victorious in overturning an injunction, obtained by her violent ex-partner at the Canadian Supreme Court, preventing her from ending a pregnancy. More than 10,000 women demonstrated in Montreal in support of Daigle.

[5] https://femicideincanada.ca/callitfemicide.pdf

prominence to the incel community. Twenty-two-year-old Rodger embarked on a shooting and stabbing spree which culminated in the deaths of six people, before he took his own life. The attack was fuelled by misogyny and sexual frustration as detailed in his lengthy written and video manifestos providing insight into his twisted ideologies. A member of PUAHate, Rodger had posted many tirades about feminism and race on this forum prior to conducting the massacre; in one post, he encouraged incels to retaliate against women and society: 'one day incels will realize their true strength and numbers, and will overthrow this oppressive feminist system. Start envisioning a world where WOMEN FEAR YOU'. Women, however, already live in a culture of fear, they police their behaviours and movements to avoid male violence, to the extent that it is habitual (Stanko, 1985, 1990; Vera-Gray, 2018). Rodger, as a privileged and entitled man, would be unaware of women's lived realities and had not engaged with women in a healthy manner to appreciate this.

Although Rodger's self-identification as an incel is inconclusive, he has since become a martyr within incel communities and revered in online chats in the manosphere. His admirers have bestowed on him the honorific 'The Supreme Gentleman', a term Rodger used to refer to himself. In some respects, Rodger is the incel equivalent of Anders Breivik[6] for white supremacists: a hero and an inspiration who is labelled as a 'Saint' by his sympathisers and canonised by his followers, with his image often transposed onto religious iconography. The SPLC claims that Rodger's actions were directly linked with the alt-right, as a marginalised youth who found a sense of community in the fringe alt-right – typically blaming personal deficiencies on non-white ethnicities and women.

> The thing about Elliot Rodger was he felt entitled to the very attractive supermodel women. What was sad was if he was told just to be nice and polite and he would get a girlfriend, which wasn't the case. (Tom)

Lawrence Levine, Lucero Alcaraz, Quinn Cooper, Lucas Eibel, Jason Johnson, Treven Anspach, Rebecka Carnes, Kim Saltmarsh Dietz, Sarena Moore

On 1 October 2015, 26-year-old Chris Harper-Mercer, who had described himself as mixed-race, and had been clinically diagnosed with Asperger's syndrome, armed with six guns, a flak jacket and spare ammunition magazines, killed nine people in the writing class where he was enrolled, at Umpqua Community College Oregon. Mercer took his own life after the police shot and wounded him. Although initially the attack was thought to be religiously motivated – according

[6]Anders Breivik is a Norwegian terrorist and right-wing extremist who committed the 2011 Norway attacks. On 22 July 2011, he killed 8 people by detonating a van bomb amid Regjeringskvartalet in Oslo and then killed 69 participants of a Workers' Youth League (AUF) summer camp in a mass shooting on the island of Utøya.

to survivors, Harper-Mercer interrogated his classmates about their faith before shooting them, a typewritten manifesto left behind at the scene of the massacre and online postings that he had previously made indicate that he was angry at not having a girlfriend and resentful against a world that he believed was functioning against him. The manifesto showed that Harper-Mercer had studied mass killings, including that committed by ER, and similar to Rodger, expressed his sexual frustration as a virgin. Accordingly, Harper-Mercer, using the handle lithium_love, had commented on a thread titled 'How many girlfriends have you had?' with the response '0. Never had anyone'. This was further elaborated upon with 'well, it means I've never been with anyone, no woman nor man (nor dog or animal or any other)', later stating in response to a comment that he 'must be saving himself for someone special' that this was 'involuntarily so'. This is the closest documented evidence of Harper-Mercer being an incel, although he may not have necessarily self-identified as so, particularly in regard to the adoption of the blackpill, which was less established then. Nevertheless, the incel wiki describes him as an 'involuntary celibate shooter' accompanied by the statement that it does not support him or his actions.

Harper-Mercer had also made online comments about the notoriety achieved from committing murder. There were rumours that he had been a member of 4chan and had posted a warning of the attack on the /r9k/ board 'Some of you guys are alright. Don't go to school tomorrow if you are in the northwest'. However, there is no way of verifying that this did come from Harper-Mercer due to the anonymous nature of the platform. The phrase 'some of you guys are alright' later became a meme on /r9k/ and elsewhere through the spaces of the alt-right and the manosphere.

Donald Doucette

On 31 July 2016, 38-year-old Sheldon Bentley, whilst working as a security guard in Edmonton, Alberta, killed a 51-year-old homeless man – Donald Doucette – by stomping on his torso and robbed him of $20. Bentley claimed that being involuntary celibate for the preceding four years had contributed to him committing the killing.

Francisco Fernandez, Casey Jordan Marquez

On 7 December 2017, 21-year-old William Atchison killed two students and then himself at his former school – Aztec High School, New Mexico. Atchison had been harnessing his violent fantasies and obsession with school shootings for years beforehand online, practised his attack in an online video game designed to emulate a mass shooting event and had been immersed in communities discussing and celebrating white supremacy, racial and social prejudices. He had even been investigated by law enforcement in 2016, after concerns were raised about his threats to enact violence, and it was discovered that he had been in contact with other shooters[7]; however, he convinced agents that he was merely engaging in online trolling. The SPLC states

[7]Ali David Sonboly, the 18-year-old who shot and killed nine people in a Munich, Germany, mall on 22 July 2016.

that Atchison bore all the hallmarks of the alt-right, and although it is unclear as to whether Atchison identified as an incel, he is believed to have used the pseudonym 'Elliot Rodger' on several online forums and praised the 'supreme gentleman'.

Alyssa Alhadeff, Martin Duque, Alaina Petty, Alex Schachter, Jaime Guttenberg, Cara Loughran, Gina Montalto, Luke Hoyer, Peter Wang, Carmen Schentrup, Nicholas Dworet, Joaquin Oliver, Helena Ramsey, Meadow Pollack, Scott Beigel, Chris Hixon, Aaron Feis

On 14 February 2018, 19-year-old Nikolas Cruz killed 17 people and injured 17 others in a shooting at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida. Cruz had previously been expelled from the school for disciplinary reasons, which according to another student were related to a fight Cruz had been in with his ex-girlfriend's new boyfriend. There were also claims that Cruz had been abusive to the ex-girlfriend. Cruz's social media included racial slurs at black and Muslim people, support of the Anti-Defamation League and white supremacists and his aspiration to become a 'professional school shooter'. Cruz had also commented on a YouTube post that ER 'will not be forgotten'. Following the attack, posts were made on incel forums, praising Cruz – referring to him as a 'hero' and the 'man of the year'. There are claims that a post on 4chan was reportedly made by Cruz before committing the massacre:

> I WILL SHOWER THE NORMIES WITH LELAD [*sic*.] TONIGHT. GIVE ME SOMETHING TO PUMP AND BLAST UP TO … FUCK YOUR SCHOOL I'LL FUCK YOU UP FUCK OFF UCKING FUCK FUUUUUUUUUUUUUCK FUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUU UUUUUUUUUUCK FUCKING NORMIE N**GERS GET THE FUCK OUT

Although this cannot be validated, responses were made to this post congratulating Cruz for delivering on his promise. Taking a stance against this abhorrent attack and far too many others like it, a group of students from Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School publicly called out the National Rifle Association's (NRA) influence on national politics and the leaders who enable negligent gun laws. They started a youth political movement #NeverAgain to pass comprehensive gun reform, resulting in international gun debates, and the organising individuals ended up on the cover of *TIME* magazine. Although new legislation has yet to be enacted, the resilience and resistance of this young generation is a beacon of hope for the future.

Anne Marie D'Amico, Dorothy Sewell, Renuka Amarasingha, Munir Najjar, Chul Min (Eddie) Kang, Mary Elizabeth (Betty) Forsyth, So He Chung, Andrea Bradden, Geraldine Brady, Ji Hun Kim

On 23 April 2018, 25-year-old Alek Minassian drove a rented van deliberately into pedestrians on a busy pavement in Toronto, Canada, killing 10 and injuring 16.

Minassian, who had no former convictions and was previously unknown to the authorities, made the infamous post on Facebook, prior to launching the attack, which has since become synonymous with incels:

> Private (Recruit) Minassian Infantry 00010, wishing to speak to Sgt 4chan please. C23249161. The Incel Rebellion has already begun! We will overthrow all the Chads and Stacys! All hail the Supreme Gentleman Elliot Rodger!'

When details of this post were first released, its authenticity was strongly questioned by academics and online users. Media manipulation experts such as Whitney Phillips, knowledgeable about online hoaxes in the wake of mass murders and the troll culture connected with 4chan, mentioned in the post, warned that it needed to be approached with 'extreme caution'[8]. Phillips described the 'standard and steady effort' to associate 4chan with media news stories, and the delight that 4chan members take in misleading journalists into mentioning the site in their reports. A connection with 4chan in the wake of a high-profile attack has even got to the point where it is a recurring trope or meme, further amplified by media erroneously reporting the supposed 4chan link. Phillips was sceptical of Minassian's Facebook post because the majority of previous 4chan connections were eventually debunked; however, it is now generally accepted that this post is authentic and supported by Minassian's self-adoption of the term incel. Phillips refers to this a 'meme coming to life' and notes how Minassian has connected himself to the 'long list (of) traditional hoaxes that have come and gone'. The extent of Minassian's engagement and affiliation with the incel community and ideologies are uncertain though, with little evidence that he had actively participated incel in forums or discussions, only that he had searched for information on past 'incel killers'. Furthermore, though he claimed to have been in contact with both ER and Chris Harper-Mercer prior to their attacks, this can be not be supported nor disproved. Minassian has now been found guilty of the murder of 10 people and the attempted murder of 16 others, though notably was not prosecuted for terrorism. His association with the incel community has also been somewhat downplayed by the presiding Judge in his case – Judge Molloy – who viewed this as a means to obtain notoriety and deflect responsibility, exampled in his attention-seeking Facebook post. Nevertheless, Minassian along with Rodger remain the incel 'poster boys' in the external public consciousness and in some incel sites, despite both arguably not being actual incels. Their legacies thrive to inspire future individuals looking to obtain similar infamy under the guise of the underdog retaliating at an 'unjust' world. As John stated:

> Elliot and Alek are however glorified by incels. Keep in mind this is a radical toxic cult, they will glorify someone like that. Many

[8]https://www.thestar.com/news/gta/2018/04/24/facebook-deletes-post-linked-to-alek-minassian-amid-questions-about-its-authenticity.html

> incels see their acts as revolutionary because it's like they carried out a revenge against what they believe had done wrong to them (women, society, etc.). Both of them are essential to incels, they're seen as a kind of Che Guevara or some revolutionary. (John)

Maura Binkley, Nancy Van Vessem

On 2 November 2018, Scott Beierle, a master's educated, 40-year-old army veteran, walked into a Tallahassee Hot Yoga studio, located near to Florida State University, shot and killed two women and injured four other women and one man, before turning the gun on himself. Beierle who had previously been investigated for harassing a woman, also castigated women, black people and immigrants in online videos and songs on YouTube. In his videos, Beierle referred to women as 'sluts' and 'whores' and bemoaned women who 'betrayed their blood' by engaging in interracial relationships. In one of his videos, titled 'Plight of the Adolescent Male', Beierle referred to ER:

> I'd like to send a message now to the adolescent males ... that are in the position, the situation, the disposition of Elliot Rodger, of not getting any, no love, no nothing. This endless wasteland that breeds this longing and this frustration. That was me, certainly, as an adolescent.

Another video 'The Rebirth of my Misogynism' featured him listing the names of women – from school through to his time in the Army – who had committed 'collective treachery' against him, whilst songs uploaded to SoundCloud included 'Nobody's Type', which expressed his bitterness over women not finding him attractive. Although, as with many of the associated incel killers, other than the nod to ER, there is little evidence of Beierle actively participating on incel forums and engaging with the blackpill, though there are obvious connections with his misogynistic rants, dissatisfaction with his appearance and his being perplexed over women not wanting to be with him.

Ashley Noelle Arzaga

On 24 February 2020, Ashley Noelle Arzaga was fatally stabbed, and another woman and man injured at a massage parlour in Toronto by a 17-year-old boy who has not been named due to being a minor. The teenager became the first Canadian, and indeed the first individual, to be charged with carrying out an incel-inspired terrorist attack, after evidence found by investigators indicated that his actions were motivated by violent misogynistic ideology and participating in the incel community. Thirty-one years after the Montreal massacre, misogyny was finally recognised as a driver for terrorism by the Canadian authorities.

There is also speculation about the connection with Brenton Tarrant's attack on 15 March 2019 on mosques in Christchurch, New Zealand, and incels. Tarrant posted a 74-page manifesto on 8chan before live streaming his massacre on Facebook,

which left 51 people dead and over 50 wounded, including a three-year-old boy. However, I have chosen not to include it with the above cases, because aside from his white supremacist ideals and him frequenting similar forums on 4chan and 8chan, there is no evidence relating Tarrant to the incel community, and any such claims have been rejected by those sites, which is distinct from the aforementioned incidents. Nevertheless, Tarrant's and the other perpetrator's actions demonstrate that declarations of violent discriminations should not be cordoned off from the physical violence that tragically claims people's lives.

Whilst the rise of incel-inspired extremist violence is most prevalent in North America, the threat is seen as spreading to Europe, and experts suggest it is only a matter of time before the United Kingdom witnesses a violent attack by someone identifying as involuntary celibate (Hoffman et al., 2020). Certainly, there have already been potential UK incel attacks thwarted; in March 2020, a 22-year-old man from Middlesbrough reported in the media as the 'UK's first incel bomb maker[9]' was prosecuted for possessing explosives and terrorist materials, which he wanted to use to launch an attack as retribution for his lack of success with women. Further, in January 2021, Gabrielle Friel, aged 22, was jailed for 10 years after being found guilty of offences under the Terrorism Act, after arming himself with a high-powered crossbow and a foot-long machete.[10] Friel was also originally charged with conducting online research on mass murders, especially those associated with incels, such as ER; however, any motivation by incel ideology was not proven. Additionally, Australia is also viewed as an appealing place for the growth of incels, given the problematic volume of domestic violence cases as well as the increase in far right extremism which was flagged by the Australian Security Intelligence Organisation (ASIO)[11] earlier this year.

Klein (2012) in her book *The Bully Society* examined how a society of 'gender police' that enforce traditional and hegemonic ideas of masculinity has contributed to mass shootings at schools by young white men. She argues that these men who are marginalised, and possess traits that are feminine, feel powerless when these attributes are picked on by other people. They, therefore, settle on ideologies and figures that give them a sense of power, and resort to violence as a way to prove their masculinity and to enact revenge. Many of the young men who have committed school shootings and mass shootings in America share similarities to incels, in the way that they are often seen as failing in traditional ideas of masculinity and have little success with women. Klein uses the case of Michael Carneal[12] to illustrate her arguments and points out that his first victim was Nicole Hadley, a girl who he allegedly was 'in love with' but who did not share his feelings. This case shares similarities with the mass killings – by ER, Nikolas Cruz

[9]https://www.thesun.co.uk/news/11268587/violent-fantasist-jailed-incel-bombmaker/
[10]https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-scotland-edinburgh-east-fife-55631950
[11]https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2020/dec/10/a-threat-to-australia-experts-welcome-inquirys-focus-on-rise-of-rightwing-extremism
[12]https://www.history.com/this-day-in-history/a-young-murderer-is-indicted

and Alek Minassian, who used their perceived rejection by women as justification for their attacks (Bael et al., 2019; Collins, 2018; Scaptura & Boyle, 2020).

There is an indication that some of these incel attacks have been conducted by persons separate from actual incels, as there is little evidence of their direct engagement with the community. Additionally, the homage paid to earlier 'incel' perpetrators means that the notion of copycat crimes comes into play. The term 'copycat crime' has been used in popular discourse and academic literature to refer to crime imitating and influenced by the media. Helfgott (2008) describes copycat crime as crime inspired by another crime, which has been publicised in the news media or fictionally or artistically represented, where the offender incorporates aspects of the original offence into a new crime. In the aforementioned cases, there are elements of the same modus operandi, such as the use of guns and knives (although Minassian is the anomaly in using a vehicle), but, in itself, utilising the same type of weapon seems a broad stretch to warrant copycat crimes being committed and could also be comparable with other mass shootings, in particular school shootings (Borum, Cornell, Modzeleski, & Jimerson, 2010; Muschert, 2007; Verlinden, Hersen, & Thomas, 2000). The perpetrator's school was the site of attack for some of the perpetrators, who associated this with those they wanted to get revenge upon and who were representative of the demographics they wanted to target. The shared motivations in the narratives of their online accounts – misogyny, racism, white supremacy, rejection – may well have been influenced by each other, yet are symptomatic of wider manosphere and alt-right ideologies, not just incels.

Multiple academics have argued that attacks by incels fit within the definition for terrorism, and the SPLC has officially added the community to their list of dangerous hate groups (Bael et al., 2019; Beauchamp, 2019; Collins, 2018; Richter & Richter, 2019). Terrorism is a much-contested term, with definitions differing nationally and internationally, such that some writers claim a universal definition is unlikely (Shafritz, Gibbons, & Scott, 1991; Weinberg et al., 2004). Viewed through a global lens, though, there is a general acceptance that the point of terrorism is to terrorise, with the act of doing so historically assumed by an organised force (Chailand & Blin, 2007). In addition to terror and intimidation, there are other factors such as violence, harm, threats, political motivation, the targeting of civilians, non-combatants and innocents and deliberate attempts to publicise the acts of terror. Violence for political purposes is evidenced across acts of terrorism, warfare and insurgency, and terrorists seldom refer to themselves as such (Silke, 2018). Some incels dispute that the incel attacks qualify as terrorism because there is no realistic policy change that is being advocated, since their frustrations are merely a result of failed interpersonal relationships. However, the perpetrators in their manifestos and defences justify their use of violence to assuage their grievances; hence, their violence is ideological in nature, and they have attacked civilians in order to have a psychological impact on society, all classic hallmarks of terrorism. Attempting to distinguish between the individuals who have conducted acts of mass murder and the wider incel community is challenging, particularly when threats about physical violence and the use of force are commonplace on incel forums and discussions, and these are often accompanied

with desired outcomes, that is, making a stand against women/feminism/society. It would also be easy to brush off this community as a small online subgroup, but the reality is that incel is the product of a society that has long been rooted in misogyny. These online spaces are a reflection of the real world, shaped by anger, entitlement and hatred towards women (Beauchamp, 2019) and the broader problem of male violence against women.

Moghaddam's (2005) staircase analogy represents how individuals increasingly become indoctrinated into extremist groups. The initial stair begins with individuals' perceptions of injustice and a desire to improve their situation (Moghaddam, 2005). For incels, this could be the first step with young men, who are frustrated and disillusioned, undertaking online searches in order to find answers or support from others as to how to obtain a girlfriend or how to cope with rejection, discovering the incel community and the blackpill. The vast majority of those who are engaging with the community and self-identifying as incel will never leave that bottom stair and not consider stepping up the staircase further to extremism or terrorism. However, a tiny majority have and do move up the staircase, from displacement to disengagement from mainstream morality, where their choices become fewer and fewer, because the options they perceive available to them are narrower (Moghaddam, 2005).

There has been some consideration of the relationship between domestic violence and terrorism (Ferber & Kimmel, 2008; Taub, 2016; Zimmermann, 2018). In this context, men who have committed mass murder deemed to be acts of terror have also had a history of perpetrating domestic violence, abuse and sexual offences against women. For example, the Everytown for Gun Safety (EGS), a gun control advocacy group in the United States, analysed Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) data on American mass shootings from 2009 to 2015 and found that 57% of cases included a spouse, former spouse or other family member amongst the victims – and that 16% of attackers had previously been charged with domestic violence (Taub, 2016). The latter statistic should be approached cautiously though, as these 16% of cases are only the perpetrators who had been charged with domestic violence, it is widely accepted (Felson & Paré, 2005; Straus, 1999) that this type of offence is under reported and notoriously difficult to prosecute, and so this figure might not capture the full extent of the picture.

Rachel Pain (2014) states that domestic violence includes physical but also 'psychological and emotional tactics, including threats, isolation and undermining self-confidence', what she describes as 'everyday terrorism' (p. 532). This everyday terrorism results in fear, terror and ultimately control (Dobash & Dobash, 1979; Stark, 2007). There are, however, similarities between the concepts of domestic violence and terrorism. Pain (2014) defines terrorism as an extension of everyday terrorism, 'an attempt to impose or disrupt an order through violence and fear which aims to have these effects within macro-political geographic settings' (p. 536). Additionally, Ganor (2005) described how the primary aim of terrorists is to create fear in the target population, with the intention that the fear is translated into pressure on governments to acquiesce to the terrorists demands in order to prevent future attacks. Taub writing in the *New York Times* (2016) has even defined domestic violence as 'intimate terrorism', whilst Ferber and Kimmel

(2008, p. 885) interpret domestic violence as a restorative means comparable with terrorism – a 'reclamation of lost but rightful authority'. They argue:

> And like terrorism's goal of frightening an entire population into submission to this restoration of unchallenged masculine authority, so too is the goal of domestic violence the frightening of an entire class of people, namely women, into subjection to men's rightful authority over them. Only with such a restoration do terrorists, either political or interpersonal, regain their masculinity. (Ferber & Kimmel, 2008, p. 885)

Although all terrorist activities are based in extremist ideology, very few people who actually hold these ideologies go on to become terrorists (Ferber & Kimmel, 2008). Accordingly, though there are many terrorist activities perpetrated by individuals with histories of domestic violence, not all of those who have committed domestic violence will go on to become terrorists. Nevertheless, ideologies of far right and Islamist extremist groups share a common vision of women and their inferior role in society, and adhere to hegemonic expectations of masculinity, both in their world views and in their action and political mobilisation (Ferber & Kimmel, 2008). Journalist Soraya Chemaly states that domestic violence and the toxic masculinity that fuels domestic violence are the 'canaries in the coal mine for understanding public terror, and yet this connection continues largely to be ignored, to everyone's endangerment'.[13] Chemaly notes that other factors such as racism, access to guns or mental illness are all factors, but many of these issues originate in the home. Nowadays, the influences in the home extend to the virtual domain, where individuals seek like-minded others in organisations and communities, which provide comfort and attention.

There is a lack of consensus amongst experts as to what extent the internet serves as a vector of radicalisation, with some citing offline links to be just as, if not more, significant (Maher, 2014; Neumann, 2016). Yet, it is abundantly clear that today online communities from fringe platforms in the Chansphere to mainstream sites play a key role in broadcasting extremist ideologies, leading to increased recruitment and mobilisation for the causes (Perry, 2001). Lonely individuals, those with a desire for belonging, or recognition, can also absorb the ideologies and act upon them.

Lone Wolves

So far, the incel threat appears to be from lone actors and not any small cells or groups. 'Lone wolf' is often attributed to acts committed by individual white men, though not exclusively as there are cases of lone shooters of other ethnicities, described in the same manner. The term lone wolf was popularised in the late 1990s by white supremacists Tom Metzger and Alex Curtis to encourage other

[13]https://womenaware.net/news/connecting-domestic-violence-and-mass-shootings-orlando-gunmans-history-of-dv/

racists to act alone for tactical security reasons when committing violent crimes. Lone wolf terrorism, as defined by Bakker and de Graaf (2011), refers to

> individuals that are inspired by a certain group but who are not under the orders of any other person, group or network. They might be members of a network, but this network is not a hierarchical organisation in the classical sense of the word. (p. 3)

Throughout the course of this research, there did not appear to be an organisational element to incels, with leaders at the top of a hierarchy instructing those lower down the scale to recruit for the operation, for example. Although there are more renowned incels such as Eggman, Sergeant Incel and Master Incel (of incels.co and now incels.is), for example, who are very active online and produce lots of videos that may play a part in grooming others to the incel mentality, they are not viewed as having any sort of control over the community, though they are mentioned in regard to how people first became aware of incels. Therefore, even though there may not be a clear formulated approach to radicalise others to join the incel community or to adopt the philosophies of the blackpill, the materials readily available online are drawing susceptible young men in. Whether or not they become active members of the incel community, some young men are then inspired by the overt misogyny and anti-establishment discourses to the extent they develop extremist tendencies and engage in acts of terror. These are sinister performances designed to make a statement to society, procure recompense for their 'suffering' at the hands of women and portray the perpetrators as the 'real' victims.

Often the lone wolf narrative is accompanied by claims the individual is mentally ill. For those willing to dismiss incels or 'extreme' misogynists as mentally disturbed, these labels are not mutually exclusive. Individuals suffering from mental illness can also be heavily influenced by a specific ideology and commit acts of violence that qualify as terrorism. This was supported in the interviews by Ben who made reference to another infamous mass murder: 'Cho Seung Hu, the Virgina Tech shooter, killed 32 people and was mentally ill and he hated women'.

Counterterrorism Responses

To reduce the presence of terrorist groups and individuals espousing violent ideologies online, social media and technology companies have grown far more vigilant in recent years, moving to eject terrorists and their supporters from popular platforms like Twitter and Facebook (Conway, 2020; Conway et al., 2017; Conway, Khawaja, Lakhani, & Reffin, 2020). This is also a response to legislative encouragement, such as the Online Safety Bill[14] in the United Kingdom, and the

[14]https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/online-harms-white-paper/online-harms-white-paper

threat of significant fines. Language from extreme misogynist groups, however, is sometimes not as classically alarming as language from other extremist groups; therefore, it is still the case that it can more easily fly under the radar.

Disruptions of groups on mainstream sites have caused a shift towards other more clandestine platforms, like Gab, the encrypted app Telegram, and the gaming site Discord, where there is much less moderation, regulation, or oversight. The manosphere is currently flourishing in these locations, although it is likely that attempts to stamp out extremism will cause another migration to a different group of platforms and the continuous game of cat-and-mouse will continue unabated.

Whilst sites that members of the manosphere frequent, like 4chan, 8chan, 8kun and Reddit, were not originally created to be congregating points for these specific groups, the mechanisms of these sites make them very hospitable. It is easy for groups within the manosphere to establish online communities for themselves where they are free to share memes, rants, personal stories and the like all whilst evading heavy moderation for extended periods of time, sometimes years.

However, on sites like Reddit that are heavily populated with those who do not belong to the manosphere, extreme misogynist communities are often noticed by outsiders and can sometimes be 'brigaded' by other communities or even banned by site moderators. The subreddit /r/Incels was banned in November 2017 and was subsequently replaced by /r/Braincels, which was then banned in October 2019. /r/MGTOW was quarantined in January 2020, meaning that the community does not appear in any search results and users are met with a warning before entering the site. 'Shitposters' make law enforcement's job more difficult, because they add a constant torrent of noise to the possible signal from lone actors openly musing online about committing acts violence in real life. More recently, r/incelswithouthate was banned at the end of March 2021 by Reddit, ironically for espousing hateful content.

There is a funnelling effect happening online in which the most extreme members of the fringe are pushed off sites like Reddit. However, banning means migration elsewhere, often to darker, harder to access and observe sites. Hence this is not necessarily the ideal solution. Being banned or censored has ended up galvanising manosphere communities, whilst making incels become more exclusionary, insular and desperate. For example, the site PUAHate, which was removed after being associated with ER, ended up being even more extreme and misogynistic upon its resurrection as PUA Slut Hate. In addition, the mediatised connection made between the PUA community and Rodger was reductive because it failed to consider how Rodger had actively expressed his condemnation of the website and did not affiliate with the ideas of the group, having been unsuccessful in playing 'the game' and not procuring a girlfriend. In blaming an online community (no matter how problematic the ideas they espouse are) is problematic due to the symbolism this presents. This symbolically creates a legendary aspect to something that is usually an external or contributory factory rather than the main motivator, and can be appealing, encouraging others to seek it out.

For Tom, though, rather than these sites are harmful to others, his issue is that they occupy too much energy of its members:

> I think that incel forums should be closed by law, not only because those sites could breed potential terrorists, but because staying in those forums is a waste of time, that could be used for self-improvement. At the same time though I don't want them to be closed because it teaches men not to waste time putting efforts to have a relationship with a woman and that saves you a lot of time. (Tom)

Yet, Tom, also continues to see the value in incel forums because they discourage connections with women, maintaining that this is futile.

Other interviewees continued to justify violence and the ineffectiveness of shutting down incel spaces in preventing incel-inspired acts of terror, because of the growing dissatisfaction and discontentment of men:

> Even with a ban on incel sites there will still be incel terrorists in the future, like there were in the past. I think that incel terrorists will be more than in the past even with banning incel sites, because men are getting more sexless, poorer and less happy, and these are breeding conditions for violence. (Mike)

Mike's comment epitomises male supremacist ideology and how male violence is excused and vindicated through reasons that are beyond their control.

Conclusions

Incels are neither simply weirdos nor extremists. They are a heterogeneous and complex community replete with contradictions and an overwhelming inclination for validation and companionship. Subterranean values play a part in attracting young men to the manosphere and incel, under the guise of outrageousness and being anti-progressive. Despite some media representations and even how they can present themselves as offbeat, incels are not 'deviant' others, they are not separate from other men. Incel is not a unique manifestation of misogyny, confined to online spaces, instead the attitudes they espouse (though blatant and shocking) are at the core, characteristic of and reinforced by wider societal stereotypes of gender. Ironically, incel is not a rejection of the mainstream, regardless of the contempt often displayed to it by the community, as influential persons – those with prevailing offline platforms are advocating the same ideals. Although there are obvious similarities with the alt-right, incel is not a far right movement. Nevertheless, corresponding tactics are employed by incels and far right groups – particularly the alt-right – especially the use of humour and internet culture, to deflect the harms caused from their behaviours, and both benefit from algorithms, memes and echo chambers, to bolster their ideologies.

This chapter considered the high-profile cases of incel violence, and how the incel threat came to become part of the mainstream discourse as a result of these attacks, when previously the community and others in the manosphere were able to disseminate their hatred with little concern or impunity, due to the fact that misogyny has for so long been the last taboo, where the denigration of women is accepted and tolerated.

Digital technologies enabled the growth of groups such as incel and provide spaces for disillusioned men to gain the attention and notoriety they feel they are lacking elsewhere in their lives, which can and has spilled over into offline violence. Parallels between incel attacks and domestic violence and school shootings have been considered, particularly in relation to age, connection with some victims, and cases where attacks have occurred at perpetrator's former schools or colleges. Certain forms of extremism and extremist behaviours, however, such as that conducted by incels and MRAs, invoke 'lone wolf' descriptions or explanations associated with mental health instead. This is unhelpful as they overlook the influence and dynamics of the community. Finally, responses to incel, such as banning of forums and sites, may actually be aggravating the issue, in driving members to more clandestine online spaces, where there is more of a potential for outsider extremist tendencies to flourish, due to even less opportunities for individuals to engage with opposing conducive narratives.

This page intentionally left blank

Chapter 5

Legitimising Misogyny

> It is a very scary time for young men in America, where you can be guilty of something you may not be guilty of … Women are doing great. (Donald Trump, 2 October 2018, on the #MeToo movement)

The virtual war against women is not confined to or predominantly fostered within incel spaces, and it is also not occurring entirely online, though much of the support and dissemination of the misogynistic and anti-feminist messages are generated and propagated by men with extensive public platforms and followings, which then extend offline. Much of what is being espoused, however, long predates the internet and patriarchal ideologies about the inferiority of women are being regurgitated and recycled online, into the minds and mouths of people offline, in a continuous misogynistic loop. This chapter shows how even though there are 'acceptable' forms of misogyny – the day-to-day micro-sexisms easily dismissed as 'lad culture' or banter, and seemingly extreme forms – such as incels, gender inequality is preserved via normalised practices of everyday misogyny. All modes are components of the same war on women, comprising of vitriol directed towards any challenge to the patriarchal status quo and demonstrating opposition towards progression. This chapter also explores the impact of leaders, known misogynists, yet able to maintain powerful and public platforms, for example, the political success of men like the former President of the United States (POTUS) Donald Trump contributes to perceptions of women, enabling further objection towards gender equality. Then, there are those associated with the alt-right and the manosphere, including the so-called intellectual dark web. Jordan Peterson, Milo Yiannopoulos, Roosh V, Paul Elam, and others espouse the same right-wing rhetoric as that propagated by incels, Men's Rights Activists (MRAs) and the alt-right, yet are able to maintain a veneer of respectability and credence emboldening these movements, and there is evidence that their influence is leaking into public life and the mainstream.

The Incel Rebellion: The Rise of the Manosphere and the Virtual War Against Women, 97–115
Copyright © Lisa Sugiura 2021 Published by Emerald Publishing Limited.

This work is published under the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY 4.0) licence. Anyone may reproduce, distribute, translate and create derivative works of this work (for both commercial and non-commercial purposes), subject to full attribution to the original publication and authors. The full terms of this licence may be seen at http://creativecommons.org/licences/by/4.0/legalcode

All rights of reproduction in any form reserved
doi:10.1108/978-1-83982-254-420211008

Everyday Misogyny

There is established knowledge about sexual violence. In most Western democracies, the rates and patterns are very similar – 1 in 5 women and 1 in 20 men will have experienced sexual assault or rape in their lifetime. Many more will have experienced sexual harassment, street harassment and other unwanted sexual behaviours and advances. Women are overwhelmingly the victims of these harms, and men are commonly the perpetrators – including against other men. Those bodies and experiences, however, that sit outside of dominant heterosexual and cisgender norms are often targeted with sexual violence, harassment and abuse, and often this violence is motivated by discrimination and hatred. Thus, whilst the focus here is on women's experiences of sexism, harassment, sexual abuse and violence, they are not the only ones to suffer from these harms, yet the elephant in the room, the issue that often instigates defensiveness, is that almost always it is some men's use of violence, and many men's misuse of power.

When Laura Bates created the #EverydaySexism Project, initially involving a website, Twitter and Facebook accounts and hashtag, in 2012, the significant breadth and extent of sexism, sexual harassment and sexual abuse experienced by women in their everyday lives was laid bare. Millions of women used and continue to use the hashtag or send in their stories to the website, documenting both the micro and macro aggressions that occur in unexceptional and familiar ways against them – from the catcalling, the sexist 'jokes, discrimination in the workplace, right through to threats and sexual assault'. On 15 October 2017, the Hollywood actress Alyssa Milano wrote on Twitter 'If you've been sexually harassed or assaulted write "me too" as a reply to this tweet' prompting the beginning of a global outpouring of individual experiences of sexual violence and harassment and the trending of the hashtag #MeToo. Milano posted this in response to the succession of sexual harassment and assault allegations against the high-profile producer Harvey Weinstein, although MeToo had existed as a movement since 2006, founded by black activist Tarana Burke to help young women of colour who were survivors of sexual violence. Following Milano's co-opted tweet, however, the hashtag proliferated, first in response to the harassment and abuse experienced by celebrities and others employed within the Hollywood film industry at the hands of Weinstein and other powerful men – and then rapidly evolved into broader consciousness-raising and a call for collective action, including victim/survivors as well as alleged perpetrators of all genders. #MeToo, nevertheless, is widely regarded as a movement rooted in feminist digital activism, emphasising the magnitude of sexual violence experienced by women (Fileborn & Loney-Howes, 2019). Both #EverydaySexism and #MeToo highlight how seemingly innocuous sexism through to sexual violence and rape are routine and anticipated experiences that come with being a woman. The connection between the smaller, every day and sometimes banal intrusions into women's sexual autonomy – and the rarer, though certainly no less problematic – instances of rape and sexual assault, is a recognisable concept to feminist scholars. Following Liz Kelly (1987), sexism, sexual harassment and sexual violence are not independent behaviours, instead they exist on a continuum whereby the micro-sexisms such as the sexist

comments, for example, occur so frequently that they are concurrently disregarded and embedded into our everyday lives. This creates a culture of normalisation and acceptance for these everyday incidents, in which the more serious acts of sexual violence and harassment are excused or validated. Researchers have also highlighted the reach and immersion of digital technologies in our everyday lives, which enable an increased potential for greater saturation of sociocultural support for sexual violence (Jane, 2016; Mantilla, 2013; Megarry, 2014; Powell & Henry, 2017). Regarding sexual violence and harassment, women have always experienced both contact and non-contact sexual violations. Digital technologies merely extend the repertoire of non-contact forms of harm. As Sheila Brown (2006) in her influential essay 'The Criminology the Hybrids' argues, rather than seeking to understand online crime as distinct from offline crime, a technosocial framework is necessary – technology and society are mutually constitutive.

Liz Kelly (1987) also emphasised the importance for women to be able to define their own experiences as sexual abuse. This ownership and recognition of experiences is pertinent in the context of Elizabeth 'Betsy' Stanko's intimate intrusions and safety work, which addressed women's justifiable fears and the measures they employ, in the context of the wealth of sexual crimes and domestic violence, which they endure, that go unreported or unrecorded (Stanko, 1985, 1990). Vera-Gray's (2018) 'The right amount of panic' provides further insight into the methods and self-policing women use to avoid sexual violence and presents the thesis that rather than women needlessly engaging in these behaviours (as the risk of serious sexual assault is minimal), such safety work might also be saving some women from harms, particularly as they are doing what is expected of them. Hence, there are socio-structural factors underpinning women's experiences of harm and sexual violation. These concepts are incredibly useful as they make explicit the links between sexism, harassment, abuse and sexual violence.

Australian feminist blogger Emma Pitman, in writing about the 'human pyramid of misogyny' (in Meanjin, 2018), suggested that viewing misogyny as a spectrum is problematic, due to it not being a sliding scale of harm – with jokes situated at the low end and rape at the other. The notion of a pyramid, where minor acts support the major, creating at best a 'foundation of blithe indifference' and at worst a culture of amusement at women being belittled, provides another avenue for thinking about why it is that even seemingly small acts of sexism, violation and harm must be seen as inherently connected with sexual assault and rape. Misogyny endures because it is collaborative, and it is preserved via embodied structures of societal support that individuals actively uphold, especially those with the political, legal or cultural capital to effect change, but choose not to. Pitman describes the way that rapists and sexual harassers are able to stand on the shoulders of others, and she means mostly, though not exclusively, the shoulders of other men.

On every level of the pyramid intent is varied, but the impact remains. Expanding upon Pitman's original conceptualisation, on the bottom are the silent bystanders, who observe sexism, harassment, even abuse, yet do nothing. Their silence might be down to pure ignorance or indifference or affected by external

factors such as intimidation; however, the impact does not differ – silence equals complicity – creating a foundation for other men to evade retribution. Above them, are men who laugh along and find amusing the sexist 'women belong in the kitchen' or 'make me a sandwich' comments, along with rape jokes – because they are abstract, edgy and dark humour – dismissing the lived experiences of statistically 1 in 5 women and 1 in 20 men, as well as emboldening the perpetrators who via the 'hilarity' feel reassured that their actions are really not that bad. On their shoulders are those men who go a step further and join in on the joke. Then there are the apologists, those who when a woman discloses an experience of sexual violence or harassment, dismiss it as a misunderstanding, provides an excuse, or responsibilises or blames the woman instead. They will find ways to justify and support when intimate images are disseminated without the consent of the women in them (she shouldn't have taken the pictures in the first instance), or the tales of how their mates had 'fun' with a woman they got so drunk that she was barely conscious (she shouldn't have drunk so much – she should have known what was going to happen). They view feminism and conversations about sexual predators (as per #MeToo) and tackling sexual exploitation as 'witch hunts', going 'too far' and demonising men. On top of these are men who become aggressive in response to being turned down – calling women names like 'prick tease' and accusing them of leading them on, the sexual harassers at work, on the street and those who make rape or violent threats online against women. The voyeurs, who take pictures of their sexual partners without their consent and send them on to their mates. The stalkers, the men who try to constantly monitor and have complete control over their target's lives, both online and offline, including those knowledgeable about their legal limits, who avoid the boundaries of a 'repeated course of conduct' and avoid making direct threats and instead post prolifically on social media about rape and violence against women. The blackmailers, the men who were consensually provided intimate pictures for their consumption only as part of previous sexual or dating encounters, who then threatens to publicly disclose these or send to friends/family/employers when their partner wants to end the relationship. Then, there are what Pitman refers to as 'the brokers of power' – the men who are actively working to protect the structural interests and will remind women of their place and quash allegations with reminders that women will be disbelieved, such that women do not report their victimisations. It is these persons who provide institutional support for abuses to occur. Then, there are those who commit the indecent and sexual assaults through to the rapists and, on top of the hierarchy, ably supported by all the behaviours from the benign to the more sinister below them, are those sexual predators who have such power that they are protected and to an extent, visible. These are men like Donald Trump, Woody Allen, Harvey Weinstein, Jeffrey Epstein, Clarence Thomas, R. Kelly and Roman Polanski. Men who have either been accused or convicted of various sexual offences against women and who were able to continue their abuses despite them being well documented (until the public found out) or have since experienced little impact upon their careers. Unfortunately, this is not an extensive list and one that I fear will continue to be added to unless greater strides are took to disrupt the systemic misogyny preserving these types of abuses of power.

'No man is an island, and no man offends in isolation' states Pitman (2018). The pressure to exert dominance over women and less powerful men comes from above and is embedded within the patriarchal system, and the societal foundation of gender inequality ensures that women are denied sexual agency and subjectivity comparable to men, whilst men are positioned as entitled to access to women's bodies. This is underpinned by rape culture (Herman, 1989), which refers to the social and political norms, structures and practices that minimise the harms, fix the blame upon victims and excuse perpetrators of sexual assault and harassment (Buchwald, Fletcher, & Roth, 1993). Nicola Gavey (2005) in her hugely influential text *Just Sex?* argued that normative forms of heterosexuality operate as a 'cultural scaffolding' for rape (p. 2). Gavey (2005) was not suggesting that normative forms of sex are rape or are the same as rape, rather that there are areas within heterosexual sexual encounters that could fall between the realms of rape and sex. Other scholars (e.g. Allen, 2005; Holland, Ramazanoglu, Sharpe, & Thomson, 1998; Jackson, 1999; Larcombe, 2005; Powell, 2010) suggest that there is an uneven playing field created by heterosex cultural norms and prescribed gender roles for male and female identities negotiating heterosex, which excuses, facilitates and even exalts unwanted sex, pressure and coercion. Rape culture, applied in this context, addresses the sociocultural premise that there is a shared social responsibility for sexual violence, rather than it being caused solely by individual pathological reasons. Rape culture is also a concept used to challenge the ceaseless responsibilisation of women and girls for their own sexual victimisation. It gives prominence to a culture of non-consent, where women and girls are denied sexual autonomy, have no agency over their own bodies and are disbelieved.

The infamous /r/incels subreddit was closed down in 2017 for advocating rape, as well as death threats against Chads, after Reddit changed its rules of conduct. Posts lamented the criminalisation of marital rape: 'if it was good enough for our ancestors then it's good enough for us' and 'no way people here believe it is a thing', applauded gang rape via a twisted utilitarian lens – 'the majority are enjoying it so what about the person who isn't', and engaged in the victim-blaming tropes where they damned 'stupid intoxicated irresponsible females at parties'. Threads were replete with heteronormative discourses and gendered assumptions that contradicted other supposed concerns about men being victims of rape and sexual assault, for example, the notion of the older female teacher having sex with their male student was much revered, rather than viewing it as a predatory act upon a minor and an abuse of power 'I wish I had a teacher like that'. Although the /r/thread is an excessive example of incel misogyny, hence its removal, this was what was occurring away from public view, infiltrating the mindsets of impressionable young men and normalising oppressive attitudes towards women and girls. It is almost as if society had its own pill to take in awakening to the realisation of the harms arising from these online spaces.

Nevertheless, even though incels are undeniably associated with misogyny, there are those within the community who have no problem stating their hatred of women yet struggle to view themselves as misogynist. Even a cursory inspection of incel forums reveals individuals who present this erroneous juxtaposition,

who challenge the very notion of misogyny, whilst at the same time espousing how women are worthless and better off dead. On the surface, this may seem that incels are concerned with their presentation and potentially being negatively perceived; however, this is a subculture that actively, and in some way, seeks to set itself apart from the rest of society, who they believe has turned its back on them anyway. They are distinct from what they imagine the mainstream to be, via their belief in the blackpill and how this ideology has opened their eyes to how forces beyond their control have shaped their lives. Therefore, being considered pejoratively would not be their primary concern, especially when they have such an unfavourable view of themselves, although being labelled negatively has had a detrimental effect on incels in potentially isolating them further. The denial of misogyny, however, relates to their dismissal of the existence of misogyny rather than seeking approval from normies. Due to their knowledge of the 'truth' of how the world unfairly operates in favour of women and handsome men, incels are justified to hate women; although for incels, it is not really hatred if it is legitimised. As per Sykes and Matza's (1957) techniques of neutralization, victims – in this case women, who are on the receiving end of incel abuse – are denied this status, and they are also denied injury – as due to their supposed privilege over incels, they will continue to have the upper hand, and further, incels appeal to higher loyalties – in adhering to the blackpill this provides credence to pejoratively call out women. Another way that incels refute the notion of misogyny is to counteract it with misandry, something which Marwick and Caplan (2018, p. 548) describe as being employed as 'a synonym for feminism and a false equivalence to misogyny' since its very inception. A major stance on incel forums, with clear links to the Men's Rights Movement (MRM), is that of fighting misandry and standing up for men's rights. Incels view themselves as the victims, and they are unable to meet the required hegemonic masculine standards, and due to their perceived misfortune in being born ugly, they are entitled to retaliate against women and others who oppress them.

Marwick and Caplan (2018) explored the use of the term misandry within the manosphere and found that it serves to act as a weapon to counter feminist language and ideas. Similar to MRAs, incels use tropes of male victimhood to strike back at feminism. Terms such as 'toxic masculinity' are co-opted, with discussion threads and videos dedicated to 'toxic femininity', and extreme claims that feminists are actively seeking the annihilation of men (notwithstanding the Chad alpha males naturally), with Solanas' Society for Cutting Up Men (SCUM) often presented as evidence of this.

Manosphere logic and tactics of reversing the roles of victims and perpetrators have become intimately aligned with traditional hyperbole involving sexual violence, such as rhetoric about false rape allegations and male victims of domestic abuse. In addition to this, fears about fathers losing access to their children and (unknowingly) raising other men's children are actively renewed. Incels denigrate the notion of misogyny, claiming that women face no structural oppression or inequality; hence, misandry is used as a counterargument to feminism rather than calling attention to and seeking solutions for men's problems. In addition to this archaic misogynistic and racist discourses involving pro-rape, eugenics and anti-semitism are regurgitated by incels, which is then picked up elsewhere online.

Such rhetoric did not emanate online; nevertheless, incels as well as other manosphere groups have advanced exaggerated superficial depictions of these issues to the point where they have almost become established fact. They are not just narratives advocated in online subcultural groups within the manosphere though, rather they are symptomatic of, reinforcing and reinforced by, more acceptable and normalised forms of misogyny, as well as antiprogressive heteropatriarchy support.

Although there is the denial of misogyny within incel communities, justifications defending the hatred of women are presented. As discussed previously, this is less to do with preserving character but more about refuting women's ability to suffer in a society that incels believe is structured to their advantage. Regardless, incels still provide rationalisations as to why their hatred towards women is warranted. A common theme prevailing amongst incels is that of rejection. As evidenced earlier, rejection is presented as not only a reason to loathe women but also what made them initially self-identify as an incel:

> Most incels that hate women do so because they have not had that affection or intimacy given to them as they are promised that they will find someone someday. (Tom)

> We are sick of getting rejected and sick of being led on by women. (Lee)

> I feel like a loser because I can't find anyone. (Carl)

Further strengthening the notion that misandry is a pervasive problem in contemporary society, as well as undergirding the reasons for them being sexually rejected is the incel's perspective that women are naturally corrupt. However, this is presented in contradictory terms, because, on the one hand, women are seen as inferior subordinates – who are less than men in all aspects – for example, in intelligence, strength, empathy, rational thought. Whilst, on the other hand, they have power because they are able to fabricate sexual violence and oppress men by withholding sex, by exploiting their sexual market value (SMV) superiority. Women are dehumanised and demonised such that they are the logical enemy of incels and the harbinger of all incel problems, which therefore permits aggression and hatred towards them.

Incels do, however, resent the inaccurate and often homogenising portrayals of them, and I as a researcher and an outsider to the community, as well as the 'female enemy', am acutely aware that my analyses and interpretations of them might be disagreed with. It is also noted that incel forums and sites, although often publicly accessible, do have an insider status to them such that outsiders are not welcome. In particular, these are spaces that are clearly not for women, and so incels have stated that if women see and become upset at the vitriol against them that is propagated in these sites, then it is their fault for being there. The indication is that incels are posting content for each other rather than for public consumption, in a perverse combative manner, whereby they battle over who is the 'biggest

loser' and who can post the most preposterous content. It doesn't escape me that in drawing public attention to incels misogyny and their offensive vernacular this exposes more women to the harms of what incels are expressing, as well as the risks of homicidal others jumping on the incel bandwagon to establish notoriety. Nevertheless, the alternative, ignoring them and allowing the hatred to flourish unchecked, would be far worse, and certainly, incels were dismissed as a random online subcultural group for too long such that their harms were overlooked.

Within incel communities, there is also evidence of othering occurring, with some attempting to distance themselves from those who they consider to be more extreme or problematic. Often these individuals do recognise how the hateful comments do amount to misogyny and vocalise this, much to the chagrin of others within the community. One of the interviewees stated the following:

> When I carefully assess myself it is difficult to [reconcile] myself with the kind of men that tell stories on Reddit. I do resent women sometimes, however, I have two sisters and I wouldn't forgive myself if anything happened to them. (Pete)

It is interesting that empathy for women is only based off the fact that they have female family members. This was also observed on incel forums where amongst the fantasies of raping and murdering women, there would also be reference to how mothers and sisters were distinct from other women and therefore worthy of their affection and respect.

In assuming the blackpill ideology, incels have supposedly woken up to the delusions of the world and are rejecting societal expectations. It was the importance that society places on romantic and sexual relationships, and finding the perfect partner, that created them in the first instance. Discussions on incel forums, however, expose a further contradiction, as many incels unambiguously declare how they still want a partner and so have not entirely abandoned all hope of having sex and finding love and thus could be questioned as to whether they are truly blackpilled. Such declarations are often met with derision, and suggestions for those individuals to self-harm or even take their own life for being so cucked, such is the 'support' available within the communities. Essentially, a consensus is sought, with the blackpill ideology the cement to bind beliefs together and those that show deviation or disagreement to this are berated. There is a feeling of being lied to, and within this mindset, the trope that women don't like 'nice guys' and instead prefer 'bad guys' is proliferated. Incels believe that women will only find the extremely 'hot' men attractive, as if there is a standardised objective consensus amongst women in regard to height, facial structure and race. As a result, women are deemed to only date and have sex with Chads, as well as hating men who are unattractive, again adhering to the notion that there is an agreement amongst women as to what constitutes unattractiveness. Since incels consider themselves to align with such supposed measures of ugliness, they resign themselves to the fact that women will never like them. Therefore, listening to women and treating them with respect isn't going to get them to have sex with them because women are inherently programmed to dismiss the 'nice' incels, and

so incels realise that it would be futile to try, and instead, look to remove women from their lives, or turn to hating them and wishing them ill, which undermines their declaration of being 'nice guys' somewhat. Hence, when incels hear about women who have been abused by their boyfriends or husbands, they rejoice that women are receiving what they deserve for their poor choices.

This victim-blaming sentiment is also extended to women who are murdered by men. During the time of writing this book, a 33-year-old woman named Sarah Everard went missing in the United Kingdom. The investigation over the course of a week changed from a missing person's inquiry to a homicide investigation, with her body subsequently being found. Although this case is unfortunately far from isolated when we consider the extent of men's violence and abuse against women, it captured the public imagination. The case reignited the tiresome debates about women's responsibility and accountability for their safety – with police reportedly advising women in the Clapham area of London, where Sarah was abducted from, to avoid going out at night. Furthermore, all the measures women implement in order to protect themselves from men's violence (Vera-Gray, 2018) were highlighted. Women took to social media to vocalise their fears about male violence only to be labelled hysterical or have their lived experiences undermined, whilst the #NotAllMen resurfaced to highlight how women shouldn't generalise about or fear every man. This completely negates the fact that women already know that not all men are dangerous. It is not the fact that women think all men are going to hurt them, rather it is because there are enough men who have or who are capable of hurting them and women don't know which ones these are, that women have these justifiable apprehensions. This added to the experiences of everyday sexism, intimidation, abuse and sexual violence – Liz Kelly's (1987) astute conceptualisation of the continuum of sexual violence that all women have invariably experienced in one shape or form means that women have learnt to be aware of the violent threat that men pose to them. A resistance, however, grew online, with women and male allies, calling out this blatant victim-blaming. Offline, in many cities across the United Kingdom, drawing inspiration from the second-wave feminists who undertook 'Reclaim the Night' marches in the 1970s,[1] 'Reclaim these streets vigils' were organised to pay tribute to Sarah and challenge the control of women's bodies and behaviours. During this, some incels posted horrific comments revelling in the killing and what this symbolises to women, which I

[1]The first Reclaim the Night march in the United Kingdom took place on 12 November 1977 in Leeds, organised by the Leeds Revolutionary Feminist Group who wanted to express their concerns about the violence and harassment women faced from wolf-whistling to rape and murder, particularly as Peter Sutcliffe – the Yorkshire Ripper was still at large at that time. The group had been inspired to undertake their own Reclaim the Night marches after learning about how women in Germany had took to the streets there to protest against their mistreatment at the hands of men. At least 12 Reclaim the Night marches took place across the United Kingdom at this time. Since 2004, annual Reclaim the Night marches have been organised by the London Feminist Network.

won't reproduce here so as not to cause any further upset to Sarah's loved ones or disrespect her memory. Unfortunately, this is not unprecedented, as incels have made similar offensive comments about other high-profile murdered women previously, from current news stories as well as historical cases. Even though incel threads are generally personal rather than overtly political, incels are responsive to what is happening societally and politically and will comment from their perspectives accordingly. For example, in regard to COVID – what incels term Chad-19-chan – incels have been rejoicing at the fact that lockdown means that others (predominantly the Chads and Stacys) are unable to 'hook-up' and so incels are not the only ones having to go without sex. They have also used the example of the growth in popularity of OnlyFans during lockdown, a platform that allows users to post content and receive payment directly from their followers, to warrant their labelling of women as whores and sluts – drawing comparisons with street sex work – as some OnlyFans users distribute explicit pictures of themselves. It is not just (heterosexual) women, however, who are using OnlyFans though, gay men are capitalising on the lucrative opportunities that the platform provides.[2]

There appears a logical crossover between Trump supporters and incels, however, as with the link to the alt-right – which Trump supporters may well be aligned with, this is not straightforward and, in reality, nebulous. There is a shared sense of entitlement, of being deprived of something they automatically deserve, whilst Trump voters have a clear goal – to get/keep/restore Trump in the presidency, incels have diverging objectives – to ascend, to retaliate against their 'oppressors' or have none. Meanwhile, although incels may not necessarily have a political position nor be supporting him, the actions and ideologies of Trump himself are impactful not just to incels and the manosphere but over Western democratic societies.

At the time of writing, there was chaos in Washington, DC, as a mob of pro-Trump rioters, angered by the then outgoing president's false assertations that the electoral vote was rigged, stormed the US Capitol in a violent act of anarchy. But this was predicted and certainly the rhetoric espoused by Trump had been stirring up his supporters long before his failure at being re-elected. On the eve of the election, Trump tweeted that a court decision he did not favour would allow cheating and also lead to violence in the streets:

> the supreme court decision on voting in Pennsylvania is a VERY dangerous one. It will allow rampant and unchecked cheating and will undermine our entire systems of laws. It will also induce violence in the streets. Something must be done!

Before this, no president had ever spoken in ways that linked their elections prospects and violence immediately prior to election day. Now suspended,[3] Donald

[2]https://www.pinknews.co.uk/2020/05/07/what-is-onlyfans-gay-porn-app/

[3]After the storming of the Capitol, on 8 January 2021, Twitter permanently suspended the @realDonaldTrump account due to the risk of further incitement of violence https://blog.twitter.com/en_us/topics/company/2020/suspension.html

Trump's Twitter account had been a continuous diatribe of poorly worded, repetitive declarations imbued in ignominy and wilful ignorance, as well as sheer hatred, much of which was directed against women. In 2019, Trump was amongst the most prolific users of Twitter, with almost 60 million followers, 41,000 Tweets and an average of 7.5 Tweets posted per day. Kreis (2017, p. 614) notes that his language was 'direct and simple' and his messages 'succinct and polarising', a strategy favoured by right-wing populist discourse.

From denigrating numerous women in the public eye for not being attractive enough, calling women bimbos or comparing them to animals, to expressing disgust at breastfeeding, Trump used his power and privilege as POTUS to run his Twitter account as a platform for misogyny. In response to the many criticisms he received about objectifying women through sexist language, both on and offline, Trump downplayed his comments, referring to them as 'locker room talk' (Farenthold, 2016). His victory in the 2016 US elections even after his 'grab them by the pussy' remarks[4] were publicly released, may have, depressingly, reflected and reinforced cultural prejudices regarding gender differences and Americans' attitudes towards gender discrimination. Twitter itself is also regarded as a 'toxic place' for women (Amnesty International, 2018), due to the relentless abuses, threats and harassments used throughout the platform. Amnesty International's report discusses how Twitter's 'inconsistent enforcement and application of the rules as well as delays or inaction to reports of abuse when users breach the Twitter rules', in combination with the absence of any human rights policy commitments, demonstrate a 'failure of the company to adequately meet its corporate responsibility to respect human rights in this area' (p. 45). Corporate interests are an omni-present mediating influence in gender-based online violence that often perpetuate – or exacerbate – harms (Kim, 2020).

Giuseppina Scotto di Carlo (2020) undertook critical discourse analysis (CDA) upon a corpus of Trump's tweets from the beginning of his 2016 campaign (July 2015) to February 2019, in order to investigate the linguistic strategies, he used to negatively represent women. The study highlights how Trump's vocabulary perpetuates a male-centric hierarchy, significantly impacting upon his supporters, whilst his political domination shows how his belief systems were able to penetrate wider language and society (di Carlo, 2020). Seven core lexical and rhetorical strategies were identified by di Carlo (2020), which sound remarkably familiar to incel attitudes towards women:

1. Women are weak, lacking in strength and ability, incompetent and 'mentally instable'.
2. Women are dependent beings.
3. Women are to be judged based on their appearance rather than their intelligence or personality.
4. Women are dishonest liars and worse than men.
5. Women are disgusting animals.

[4]https://www.nytimes.com/2016/10/08/us/donald-trump-tape-transcript.html

6. Women are no more than possessions.
7. Women can be described with vulgar terms.

Both Trump's and incels' perspectives are influenced by patriarchal ideologies concerned with the derogation and objectification of women. They believe that women have juxtaposing attributes – they are fragile, helpless and needy, whilst also being untrustworthy and debased – hence their only worth is in their looks and they can be dehumanised. Like incels, Trump's Tweets portrayed his misogyny in an overt way, often used under the guise of humour; however, Trump's position of authority provided permission to engage in this behaviour unchecked for so long. Once the explicit sexism and misogyny abundant in incel discussions received external attention, site moderators commenced shutting threads down, before then, incels were able to espouse their virulent loathing and vicious fantasies about women with relative impunity because they were away from the public view. It should also be noted that Trump embodies the ideals of power deeply embedded within hegemonic masculinity (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005) and so he and his ideologies are appealing to those prioritising traits of male dominance, superiority, and heteronormativity.

Trump also employed the 'men are the real victims' argument favoured by incels. This was particularly evident in his responses to the #MeToo movement, where he reignited concerns over false rape and sexual assault allegations with his comments about it being a scary time for young men who could be guilty of something they may not be guilty of. Similar to incels, Trump's opinions about women are also contradictory; on the one hand, he describes them as subordinates whose only value is in their looks, whilst on the other hand, Trump suggests that women are society's victors – they're 'having a great time' at the expense of men. Trump's response, however, was not isolated and is only part of the wider backlash against the movement and accusations of it having gone 'too far' (Fileborn & Loney-Howes, 2019). There are many posts on incel forums decrying #MeToo, drawing on the MRM's anti-feminist rhetorics and adopting a disbelieving stance of those who come forward to tell of their experiences of sexual abuse and harassment, for example:

> [The] MeToo movement has also created fear in the minds of young men that they'll be falsely accused of sexual harassment even when they just wanted to ask a girl out and did not mean to harass her.
>
> I personally know 5 men, young and older, who had their lives ruined because their wife falsely accused them of domestic violence, and this was before MeToo happened. False accusations by a woman can destroy a man's life, even if he is innocent. Moreover, when such issues are brought up they're pushed aside instead of being addressed, which creates even more frustration and resentment among young men.

In fact, a depth of hostility and trepidation remains within the American public, towards survivors who speak out against powerful men, despite the seemingly

significant impact of the #MeToo movement (Fileborn & Loney-Howes, 2019). The public and political backlash to the testimony of Dr Christine Blasey Ford is confirmation of this. In September 2018, Dr Blasey Ford accused the now associate justice of the US Supreme Court – Brett Kavanaugh – of sexually assaulting her when they were both in high school. Despite being, in Trump's words 'credible' and compelling', Dr Blasey Ford's powerful disclosure of her experience did not prevent Kavanaugh – who had been nominated by Trump – from advancing to the Supreme Court. This was in addition to three other women (although one later recanted) also accusing Kavanaugh of sexual misconduct, highlighting the continued failure to take seriously the experiences of survivors.

Further validation for incel philosophies comes in the form of public figures, who have been described as being part of the so-called intellectual dark web and those who are the faces of men's supremacist movements. In being provided platforms and often part of the mainstream (despite that being what they claim to critique), these people are the further 'respectable' faces of misogyny, racism, homophobia, transphobia and ableism.

The Intellectual Dark Web

The rationale behind the emergence of the intellectual dark web is the rejection of identity politics. The intellectual dark web is comprised of scholars who view themselves as dissidents and mavericks and position themselves as truth tellers. Whilst many are based outside of academia, some do hold university posts, with perhaps the most prolific being Jordan B. Peterson, the Toronto professor who rallies against political correctness. Peterson is notorious for his seething critiques against feminism and 'cultural marxism' – the (conspiracy) theory that Marxist Jewish academics at the Frankfurt School in the 1930s are responsible for devising the ideas underpinning multiculturalism and critical theory – essentially embedding Marxist ideals into cultural values (Neiwert, 2020). According to opponents such as Peterson, the influence of cultural Marxism is so significant that it dominates contemporary academia and culture, with feminism being one of the products of this duplicitous cabal. Peterson's ideas have infiltrated mainstream public consciousness, with his books which normalise and rationalise the patriarchial social order, regularly appearing in bestselling reading lists of literary stores.

Despite espousing many of the same ideologies, which in turn has led to him being revered by the movement, Peterson has carefully maintained a distance from the alt-right by proclaiming an alternative political stance and describing himself as a 'classical liberal'. Furthermore, Peterson has never explicitly declared affiliation with white nationalism, white supremacism or male supremacism; nevertheless, both white nationalists and supremacists, as well as incels and the broader manosphere, utilise his views and have interpreted Peterson's denial of social justice and gender equality progression as an endorsement of racial and gender hierarchies. Sharing a distain for postmodernism with the alt-right, notwithstanding purporting many of his own post-truths, Peterson rose to fame after his zealous opposition to a proposed Canadian bill prohibiting discrimination based on gender identity and expression. Peterson challenged this with claims of

free speech being hindered due to the use of gender affirming pronouns. In 2019, Peterson launched a subscription-only, 'anti-censorship' website called Thinkspot. For a fee, the platform assured its users that only a successful legal action would lead to their content being removed. The person invited to test this guarantee was none other than the far right YouTuber and Gamergater Carl Benjamin (Sargon of Akkad).

Peterson has weighed in on discussions about gender inequality, such as the gender wage gap, which he claims to be a lie based on bunk statistics and defaulting to gender role stereotypes – that women aren't in high-pressure leadership roles because they don't want them as it would be a conflict with women's 'agreeable' nature. Peterson also validated incel violence as a means to counter rejection, in the *New York Times*[5] in regard to Minassian's Toronto attack – 'he was angry at God because women were rejecting him. The cure for that is enforced monogamy. That's actually why monogamy emerges'. After receiving backlash for these comments, Peterson claimed he was misunderstood, and rather than reinforcing the incel narrative of sex redistribution and calling for women to be provided to incels, he was emphasising the logic of societies that expect monogamy:

> 'Men get frustrated when they are not competitive in the sexual marketplace (note: the fact that they DO get frustrated does not mean that they SHOULD get frustrated', Peterson wrote. 'Pointing out the existence of something is not the same as justifying its existence). Frustrated men tend to become dangerous, particularly if they are young. The dangerousness of frustrated young men (even if that frustration stems from their own incompetence) has to be regulated socially'.

In 2017, three scholars linked with the intellectual dark web – James Lindsay, Helen Pluckrose and Peter Boghossian, who describe themselves as left-leaning liberals and seemingly have more time at their disposal than most academics – coordinated a scam against gender, queer, critical race, masculinities studies, amongst others nicknamed *Sokal Squared*. Heavily influenced by the *Sokal Hoax,*[6] the ploy involved the creation of 20 fake papers using fashionable jargon submitted to various journals in these fields, with the aim of exposing ridiculous conclusions. When editors of one of the journals became suspicious that the article submitted to them was fake, the trio were compelled to publicly announce their hoax, claiming their hypothesis had been proven. That there was indeed corruption of scholarship in what they term 'grievance studies', whereby ostensible progressive goals and ideological bias are advocated against intellectual validity. Unsurprisingly, this case has been used as ammunition in the current political culture wars, with conservatives dismissive of the studies highlighting deep-rooted societal injustices, have leapt on the Sokal Squared bandwagon and are besmirching academics with accusations of being partisan culture warriors.

---

[5]https://www.nytimes.com/2018/05/18/style/jordan-peterson-12-rules-for-life.html
[6]https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2018/10/new-sokal-hoax/572212/

Male Supremacist Personalities

Blaming feminism for the decline of Western civilisation and deriding those on the left or having liberal or progressive attitudes as social justice warriors (SJWs), male supremacy is inexorably linked to the alt-right, with notably dignitaries – Milo Yiannopoulos, Roosh V and Paul Elam, amongst others, leading the men's revolutionary charge.

Milo Yiannopoulos, during his stint as the technology editor for Breitbart, the right-wing, pro-Trump news site, provided a mainstream platform for the alt-right and assisted with creating a semi-respectable veneer for the movement. Like Peterson, Yiannopoulos became a martyr for free speech, a darling agent provocateur for the far right, after he was criticised for making anti-Semite, racist and pro-paedophilic comments. In an infamous video, Yiannopoulos is supercilious about sex with 13-year-olds and indicates that he was present at a party where minors were sexually assaulted. In another, he draws on the 'statistical fact' that Jews own most of the banks and dominate the media. Yiannopoulos rationalised his comments, emphasising his homosexuality and alleging that he is a victim of child abuse, as well as referring to his Jewish mother and being raised Jewish. In 2015, Yiannopoulos engaged in what was supposedly an intellectual debate with a UK scholar about the topic of lad culture, only to use his platform to espouse what Laurie Penny describes as 'performative bigotry', where he was disinterested in entering into an actual informed and respectful deliberation (Koulouris, 2018). Instead, Yiannopoulos made deliberately outrageous claims such as even though feminists are a minority, they run the world, women who allege rape ought to be told to 'grow up' and women use their sexuality as a weapon. Yiannopoulos dismissed data from Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabularies (HMIC) and peer-reviewed academic research evidencing the severity of men's sexual crimes against women, as feminazi propaganda seeking to establish a new gender order, in which misunderstood men are the real victims (Koulouris, 2018).

For a long time, Yiannopoulos relied on the defence mechanism of being gay; however, in March 2021, he stated that he is now 'ex-gay' and demoted his husband to a housemate.[7] Yiannopoulos has claimed that his being gay was a façade to antagonise liberals who would go crazy to view a 'handsome, charismatic, intelligent gay man riotously celebrating conservative principles' and is now supporting conversion therapy. In 2019, he was permanently banned along with other far right commentators – Alex Jones, Laura Loomer, Louis Farrakhan and Paul Nehlen, from Twitter and Facebook for breaching their hate speech rules.

Daryush 'Roosh' Valizadeh established the blog *returnofkings* (RoK) in 2012 for 'heterosexual, masculine men' with the aim to

> usher the return of the masculine man in a world where masculinity is being increasingly punished and shamed in favour of creating an androgynous and politically correct society that allows women to assert superiority and control over men.

[7]https://www.lifesitenews.com/news/activist-milo-yiannopoulos-is-now-ex-gay-consecrating-his-life-to-st-joseph

Articles published on the blog include topics such as why women shouldn't be allowed to vote, why young girls are better than older women, women's intellectual inferiority and how attractive girls become ugly freaks because of feminism. Roosh V, who started his career as a Pick Up Artist (PUA), claims to have coined the term 'neomasculinity'. This relates to the idea that women only have value when they are young and fertile, and men prove their value in their resources, intellect, character and by having sex with young and fertile women. The Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC) describe Roosh V as one of the 'most public and reviled online misogynists' and presents him as a male supremacy extremist on their site,[8] along with examples of some of his most abhorrent posts and comments. Before 2015, Roosh V was relatively unknown outside of the manosphere; however, his article in February 2015 proposing rape be legalised on private property, brought him to the attention of the wider public. The article is replete with familiar victim-blaming tropes such as women being drunk and the scenario of the stranger in an alley way being `real' rape, along with the narrative of avoiding infantilising victims:

> Less women will be raped because they won't voluntarily drug themselves with booze and follow a strange man into a bedroom, and less men will be unfairly jailed for what was anything but a maniacal alley rape. Until then, this devastating rape culture will continue, and women who we treat as children will continue to act as children.

Although the term rape culture is employed, here it is applied in complete contradiction to its original feminist conceptualisation; rather, it is used to support the notion that there is a culture of sexual activities being unfairly labelled as rape. So, in this instance, the use of the term rape culture is used to further perpetuate rape culture in excusing perpetrators and fixing the blame upon victims. Following the criticism of this article including protests against him making public speeches (such that he was eventually banned in the United Kingdom), Roosh claimed it was satirical; however, it is not out of line with his entitlement towards sex and attitudes towards women and so this is subject to debate.

Roosh also claimed he was not political, although he did publicly express his delight when Trump was inaugurated, recognising that this presidency legitimised the very sexist and misogynistic behaviours he engaged in himself. In response to Trump's infamous 'pussy' quote, Roosh wrote on RoK 'if the president can say it then you can say it'. Trump's use of the manosphere looks numerical scale was also praised by Roosh 'we now have a president who rates women on a 1–10 scale in the same way we do and evaluates women by their appearance and feminine attitude'.

Adhering to accepted talking points within the manosphere and the MRM, Roosh fuelled the idea of the hypergamous nature of women, caused by the decline of the patriarchy, and fed into the narrative of male oppression, describing men

[8]https://www.splcenter.org/fighting-hate/extremist-files/individual/daryush-roosh-valizadeh

as 'the mules of society'. He wrote, in his founding neomasculinity document, in May 2015:

> We've arrived at the point where men are so consistently oppressed from birth to adulthood that any notion of female oppression can be immediately laughed at on its face …. A boy born today will be institutionally, systematically, and deliberately oppressed by all facets of society while a girl born today will be given undeniable preferential treatment over him.

Although the adoption of male victimhood is identical to the strategies of MRAs (as well as incels), Roosh was critical of MRAs for seeking support of authority figures instead of adjusting to contemporary realities. For Roosh, men do not need to be permanently victims as they can change their circumstances through the 'game' – PUA seduction techniques. In fact, Roosh blamed Elliot Rodger's attack on Rodger's lack of knowledge of the game 'we're the solution to this sort of murder rampage, he is self-delusional and massively entitled, but exposing him to game may have saved lives'. Rodger, however, had in fact, been exposed to the game, having been a member of PUAHate, where he had expressed his anger at the PUA techniques proving unsuccessful at helping him to achieve sex with women. Within this community, anger was then channelled into calls to commit violence, especially against women. Nevertheless, Roosh was careful that he and his PUA community were distanced from Rodger's atrocities. In March 2019, apparently embarrassed about his previous writings, Roosh has allegedly converted to the Armenian Apostolic Church and condemned extramarital sex.

Protégé of Warren Farrell, Paul Elam established the men's rights website A Voice for Men, which maintains that misandry is taking over the world and is often replete with violent rhetoric. Elam has dubbed October 'Bash a Violent Bitch Month', declaring that men who are physically attacked by women should 'beat the living shit out of them'. 'I don't mean subdue them, or deliver an open-handed pop on the face to get them to settle down', states Elam,

> I mean literally to grab them by the hair and smack their face against the wall till the smugness of beating on someone because you know they won't fight back drains from their nose with a few million red corpuscles. And then make them clean up the mess.

Defending such visceral aggressiveness, Elam claims that A Voice for Men deploys over-the-top language and tactics in order to overcome public indifference and draw attention to the urgent problems facing men and achieve what the earlier men's liberationists were unable to. Elam has adopted a rape apologist position and stated that if he was serving upon a jury overseeing a case with a male defendant accused of rape, he would automatically declare the defendant not guilty irrespective of the facts of the case. Elam uses his platform to indulge in his violent fantasies against women, for example, A Voice for Men launched a now defunct site called Register-Her.com, modelled after sex offender registries.

Purporting to track female murderers and rapists, as well as women who scheme against men, women were listed alongside their picture and castigated for not being imprisoned. It included women who were deemed to have falsely accused men of rape or domestic violence, women who had protested men's rights activist gatherings as well as those who had gotten on the wrong side of Elam. One such person, the feminist writer Jessica Valenti, ended up fleeing her home in fear of her safety such was the online harassment she endured. The site's motto was 'Fuck Their Shit Up', and the aim was to encourage others to pile on the abuse to these women.

Political Culture Wars

Described by Berry and Sobieraj (2014, p. 5) as comprised of 'venom, vilification of opponents, and hyperbolic reinterpretations of current events', outrage media has long been a raison detre of the political right. Shock jocks have long been in existence (see Howard Stern and his ilk); however, modern provocateurs (see Alex Jones, PewDiePie, amongst others) fuelled by audience appetite for controversy along with the addition of networked and social media have enabled an expansion of the global shift to the right. As Alison Phipps notes (2020, p. 84), the outrage employed by the contemporary right always follows the same pattern: (1) say something outrageous, (2) wait for outrage to build, (3) claim to be silenced and no-platformed, (4) build platform from outrage this generates and (5) start all over again. Such methods exploit the effects of outrage to achieve notoriety. Outrage facilitates the building of brands and is fundamental to right-wing political movements, bringing together informal political dissemination and official political activity. Far right narratives are dominating conservative media, particularly in the United States, United Kingdom and parts of Europe, but they are also increasingly featured within liberal outlets in a bid to be more balanced. From here the growth of clickbait has flourished, in what Phipps (2020, p. 85) aptly describes as the 'outrage economy' of contemporary media, intersecting with Banet-Weiser's (2015) economy of visibility.

Loud claims about being silenced from people with significant political and institutional power demonstrate that the exact opposite is occurring. If they were truly silenced, as those who are oppressed, then we would not hear or see them, and they certainly would not have the wealth of access to the public consciousness in the manner they do. As Sara Ahmed so eloquently puts it[9] 'whenever people keep being given a platform, or whenever people speak endlessly about being silenced, you not only have a performative contradiction; you are witnessing a mechanism of power'.

Claiming to be silenced amplifies and distributes reactionary forms of speech generating outrage. This is how figures such as Jordan Peterson and Milo Yiannopoulos have created platforms, by alleging they have none.

[9]https://feministkilljoys.com/2015/02/15/you-are-oppressing-us/

Conclusions

The war against women is not virtual, is very real and has been waging historically in response to women's movements and strides for equality and freedom from men's violence for far too long. Contemporary misogyny has found a new venue on the internet, enabling it to disseminate and advance in unprecedented ways and to appeal to and reach new generations of young men. Incel is the present-day depiction of all that is misogynistic, yet it is but one, albeit egregious, form. Misogyny is also not unique to cyberspace; it is embedded within mainstream culture and is regularly reinforced and validated by those in positions of power, mostly men, who lament that their freedoms are encroached when their discriminatory and bigoted behaviours are challenged. Moreover, misogyny continues to thrive, from the seemingly banal types of lad banter right through to the shadow pandemic of significant numbers of men murdering women globally. The issue here is men's violence against women and girls. Women are not being violent towards each other and are not murdering each other (aside from any isolated incidents), and there are no trends where this is happening. This is not to say, however, that all men are perpetrators or violent; in fact, the majority of men are not. Nor does this overlook men and boys, and certainly trans persons, and those who do not conform to the gender binary, experiences of violence, although they are too mostly caused by men. Without naming who is committing the violence against women and girls, the problem can never truly be eradicated, because it will be impossible to tackle the root causes of it. Let's stop legitimising misogyny and discussing it in passive terms of violence against women, which presents it as a women's problem. Recognising the issue for what it is – men's violence against women – shifts the focus on to the group who is committing or perpetrating the vast majority of the violence and takes it off the group experiencing it. It signifies to society that behaviours and attitudes advocating and enabling men's violence against women, whether through the everyday forms of sexism, through to the shocking incel rhetorics, to the physical harms, are no longer tolerated or permitted.

This page intentionally left blank

Chapter 6

Conclusion

The central argument presented in this book is that the misogynistic ideologies espoused within the incel community and the manosphere are linked with the wider sociopolitical climate; these are not confined to online spaces but are exacerbated and enabled by digital technologies. Moving beyond debates about whether incels are extremists or terrorists, I have focussed on the wider harms arising from the incel community, which includes but is not limited to the incitement of violence and hatred. Ideologies within incel, which are validated and regurgitated in the mainstream, also threaten progressiveness, democracy and equality. In this concluding chapter, broader rhetorical questions surrounding the reality of the incel threat, the wider problem of misogyny, gender expectations and entitlement, legal redress and responsibility of social media platforms, and drawing on the insights of those who claim to have achieved it – potential escape routes from inceldom, are addressed. Subsequently, the very real risks of a generation of young men vulnerable to being indoctrinated online needs to be taken seriously and mitigated against.

Conducting this research and indeed writing this book has been a challenging experience, intellectually, emotionally and not least as a woman studying self-confessed misogynists. Amongst the plethora of hatred, shocking and provoking behaviour within the incel community, however, there is humanity, vulnerability and pain, and as a result, I found myself wrestling with both pity and even sympathy for individuals in some instances, whilst simultaneously navigating a dearth of misogynistic materials, which were increasingly affecting my well-being. As a criminologist foremost, I am used to focussing on the human in even the most horrific of circumstances, but unbeknownst to me when I commenced my journey into the manosphere, I was naively unprepared for how much misogyny is prevalent within its spaces (even if it is dressed up as satire), what would emerge in the interview narratives and how this would affect me personally. I realise that divulging these reflections could invoke criticisms over my objectivity in the research and invite the 'snowflake' commentary so favoured by those on the far right; however, recognising what I as a researcher have brought to my

The Incel Rebellion: The Rise of the Manosphere and the Virtual War Against Women, 117–127
Copyright © Lisa Sugiura 2021 Published by Emerald Publishing Limited.

This work is published under the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY 4.0) licence. Anyone may reproduce, distribute, translate and create derivative works of this work (for both commercial and non-commercial purposes), subject to full attribution to the original publication and authors. The full terms of this licence may be seen at http://creativecommons.org/licences/by/4.0/legalcode

All rights of reproduction in any form reserved
doi:10.1108/978-1-83982-254-420211009

study, as well as what participants and the topic researched elicits within me, is well versed in qualitative social research (Band-Winterstein, Doron, & Naim, 2014). I am unable to divorce my identity as a woman from that as a researcher, and to attempt to do so would create an artificial research environment. Via this reflective lens, what I have been able to reconcile is that there is a need to recognise and address the problem of incel, both at a societal level and an individual level. The risk of harm is not just affecting women and wider society, but also internally within the incel community, where depression, anxiety and suicide ideation are rampant. Nevertheless, the fact that many within the incel community are vulnerable does not counteract or justify the profuse misogyny that is enacted by incels, nor does it warrant sympathy towards those indulging in narcissistic violent fantasies.

Incel is characterised by contradiction, absurdity and inconsistency. Without digital technologies and internet culture, incel as an identity would not exist, nevertheless influences from the Men's Liberation Movement (MLM) and the Men's Rights Movement (MRM) that followed are evident within the community. MLM focussed on the pressures of male gender roles without considering the impact of power or privilege and viewed these as more restrictive than female gender roles. This establishes the perspective that men rather than women are the actual victims of gender-based oppression, a mindset that continues with incels and the manosphere. The MLM explored masculinity in a manner that substituted the personal for the political, with concepts such as gender symmetry and equal oppression. This depoliticising of gender inequality has persisted through the later generations of men's movements and underpinned contemporary redpill and blackpill ideologies, contributing to the creation of incel. Incel is both the product of digital technologies and the rhetoric of twentieth-century men's movements.

The origins and context of incel are firmly rooted in Western ideology; however, despite the perception that incels are predominantly white young males, the indication is that the community includes people from all around the world, which may be due in part to the global reach of the internet. Although, the suggestion is that incel is associated with younger rather than older males, which again could be explained by the greater use of technology by this demographic but also because the ideologies are more appealing and relative to younger males. The narrative of incels as angry, entitled and hateful is but one aspect of the community, which, in reality, is populated by a diverse group of men, with a range of backgrounds and attributes, some of whom are misogynistic and some who aren't. Whiteness, however, is positioned as dominant of the racial hierarchy that exists within incels. Sexuality and gender are only understood within the context of heteronormativity by incels, homosexuality and transgender are disregarded and denounced as they do not feature within the incel world view.

The Real Incel Threat

Positioning incels as merely men who hate women because they won't have sex with them is an oversimplification. The incel community is comprised of complex issues and individuals navigating conceptualisations, expectations and performances of masculine and gender relations. Incels define the success of their

masculine performances in terms of hegemonic masculinity. In failing to meet hegemonic standards, the consequences are feeling devalued and inferior or the incel description of being subhuman. Aspects of hegemonic masculinity, however, are challenged by incels, in particular the notion that manhood is earned or achieved is a contention for the community, because without being born with a high enough standard of physical attractiveness, they are unable to fully become men and have society to recognise them as such. Male privilege is disregarded, and misogyny offset with misandry via the co-opting of the victim identity supported through the performance of geek and hybrid masculinities. This enables incels to challenge any suggestion of male power or advantage, instead framing women and feminism as the cause of their victimisation. Further, incels, in blaming feminism for women having autonomy over their bodies, have political implications extending to gender equality and human rights. Hence, women are dehumanised so that they are not worthy of said rights, and frustration and resentment ensue, because as men, there is the belief that women are subordinate to them and therefore they should be entitled to women, meaning incels are unable to handle being rejected by women.

The violent rhetoric within the incel community emanates from these feelings of frustration and resentment, galvanised by aggrieved entitlement and heightened by the incel echo chamber. The false sense of security in being reassured that all your problems are not your fault, that they are beyond your control, is seductive and hinders normal sexual development. Incels, fuelled by these perceived injustices, engage in vengeful fantasies against women, real and imagined, that have hurt them. The potential for incel-inspired offline violence as well as the actual deplorable acts that have been committed in the incel name is real and significant and cannot be disregarded; however, I suggest that it is the everyday violence within the incelsphere – the misogyny, racism, homophobia and ableism – that requires further consideration. These rhetorics have been normalised and within homosocial subcultures can develop into extreme manifestations of hatred. Although these do not necessarily directly lead to real-world violence, the ideas can fester and become a catalyst for offline violence. For example, men's violence against women is glorified in the heralding of killers such as Saint Elliot Rodger (ER), and their acts viewed as righteous retribution. Non-white incels are often told to commit suicide more than their white counterparts, because they have no hope of ever-attracting women.

Furthermore, the link with the alt-right does need to be taken seriously; there is a clear convergence in beliefs and the incitement to act upon them – this is evidenced across the high-profile instances of incel/alt-right killings. It is not necessarily the case that there are targeted radicalisations to draw others in, but what is available is especially appealing to those (young men) who are lonely and vulnerable. Incel communities offer alternative forms of intimacies, where self-focussed, continued use and presence of violent language may radicalise some individuals further. Similar arguments are made with the alt-right, language eluding to prejudice and violence is used ironically, yet it leads to increasing extremism in the environment over time. There is more to fear from other manosphere spaces overlapping with the alt-right, that act under the guise of legitimate misogyny, which are able to comfortably permeate the mainstream discourse.

The incelsphere contains general atomisation at a societal level, mental health and social issues, it is not simply down to levels of attractiveness or romantic rejection. However, media effects and emphasis on sexual success, narcissism, superficiality, insta versions of people – curated idealised representations that do not reflect reality – encourages competition. It is unfair to suggest the whole incel community is centred towards violence and hatred when it is mostly concentrated on self-loathing. Research is necessary to identify the red flags of those who have committed incel-related attacks amongst the online content and profiles, and before the posting of the details of the attacks online, however, it is recognised that it is difficult to filter what is genuine amongst the shitposting. Additionally, attention needs to stop being paid to the perpetrators of these abhorrent attacks, as it only encourages potential copycats and other disillusioned young men to seek attention in this egregious manner.

The Wider Problem of Misogyny

Incels are often described in terms that present them as a one-dimensional embodiment of misogyny. The ideology espoused by groups such as incels in the manosphere is linked with the wider sociopolitical climate, and this type of extremist behaviour is not confined to online spaces but is exacerbated and enabled by digital technologies. Whilst the internet, as a 'site of social and cultural reproduction that reflects real-world patterns' (Lewis et al., 2017, p. 1464), enables the exponential replication of misogyny by inventing, spreading and reproducing techniques to attack women (online and offline), online misogyny is not a product of the technology but a result of the society that shaped it.

Incels are the latest iteration against feminism and women's liberation, whenever there have been major gains, there has inevitably been a backlash (Faludi, 1991). Alongside the empowering movements like #MeToo and other forms of feminist digital activism, enabled by the digital technological age, men who feel that their privileges are being stripped away from them have also been mobilising. There has traditionally been a reluctance to tackle wider systemic misogyny by governments and name the agent of the problem in policy and legislation – it is men's violence against women not violence passively happening to women and girls – as the term VAWG implies, ensuring that the societal roots of misogyny remain intact. In 2021, the UK government, however, has instructed all police forces to start recording crime motivated by sex or gender – effectively introducing misogyny as a hate crime. This follows the precedent first set by Nottinghamshire Police in 2016. This does not make anything illegal that isn't already, no new law has been implemented, the only difference is how such crimes are recorded. Nevertheless, this sends a message that sexism and misogyny will not be tolerated anymore. Recognising the problem of misogyny is only the beginning though. The tragic murder of Sarah Everard in the United Kingdom was the catalyst that impacted upon recent public conscious raising about the problem of misogyny; however, other cases of black women who were murdered, including Nicole Smallwood, Bibaa Henry and Blessing Olusegun, did not receive the same public attention, the attention they too deserved. This signifies that society has a long way to go in understanding the intersection of sexism and racism.

Incel is not the only contemporary manifestation of misogyny, yet it is the convenient term for all acts of terroristic hatred against women, rather than one piece of a more expansive and insidious gender relations puzzle going back to the origins of the MRM. Critiques of men's behaviour and violence against women and girls are still taken as personal attacks and countered with defensiveness and failures to hold men accountable. The #NotAllMen reaction, whenever men's violence is highlighted, demonstrates how men continue to distance themselves from institutionalised power and privilege. The refusal to recognise gender inequalities enables the conditions for violence. When women are not equal to men, when societal attitudes and behaviours assert male dominance over women, it allows some men to abuse women.

Gender Expectations and Entitlement

There is a deep-seated resentment of women within the incel community. Women are viewed to have it easy as a result of a society that unfairly favours them. Incels' attitudes towards women are, however, more nuanced than simply hating them, with the contradictory Madonna/whore dichotomy playing an instrumental role in how women are both desired and vilified simultaneously. As the Madonna, women have revolutionary and redemptive power, which can not only transform incels into men but elevate them to a position of divinity beyond humanity. Concurrently, due to being driven by primal biological urges, women, as whores, lack rational thought and compassion. These binary descriptions dehumanise women and reduce them to their bodies and their ability to either bestow or withdraw pleasure to men. Incels deal with the tension of wanting women yet at the same time hating themselves for doing so despite knowing the truth about them. This is never more evident in the juxtaposition of comments that are misogynistic yet also express a desire for genuine connection and loving, romantic relationships with women. Moreover, the notion that women are not held accountable when they do anything wrong and are deserving of preferential treatment is condescending. Women are not Madonnas, we are fallible and not perfect, but having flaws does not make us whores either, it just means we are human.

Blackpill theories, including hypergamy, are used to support the incel contention that men have and continue to be victimised by women. Female hypergamy is believed to occur naturally, women are biologically predetermined to only seek attractive/rich male sexual partners, and so this is something that cannot be altered. The patriarchal authority, therefore, is necessary in order to maintain control over women, although incels do not necessarily recognise the patriarchy as such, currently existing, as to them, women have the upper hand in society, though the term matriarchy is not something they use either. The fundamental cause of female hypergamy is blamed on the societal, political and cultural changes implemented as a result of second-wave feminism and the sexual revolution in the 1960s, which, according to incels and Men's Rights Activists (MRAs), disrupted the natural order of society. This argument is used to reinforce the narrative that men are victims of women and feminism. By claiming that feminism has corrupted society, incels are able to cultivate their victim complex, deny women as victims and justify their animosity towards women.

The perceived failure of incels to successfully perform their expected gender role and how they react to this emphasises yet another contradiction. In not adhering to the masculine standards, incels risk being feminised, which is the greatest failure in a society that devalues femininity; hence, homosexual men in being stereotypically and ignorantly associated within feminine traits are viewed as an abnormality in the incelsphere. This, however, undermines the incel position that women are more highly regarded than men, rather there is acknowledgement of women's external positioning as inferior. Carol Hanish warned of an 'anti-woman, anti-women's liberation' propensity in the men's liberation groups, and decades later, that sentiment continues to be prevalent in contemporary MRMs and with incels. The legacy of misogyny, aggrieved entitlement and victim complex continues amongst incels, whose own narrow perceptions of gender and sexuality confine them in the role of perpetual victim, with women and feminism always to blame.

Legal Redress and Responsibility of Social Media Platform Providers

The UK government is implementing legislation to tackle online harms, including hate speech, abuse, terrorist and extremist content. The Online Harms White paper was put out to consultation in 2019 with the Online Safety Bill due for implementation in 2022. The regulation places a duty of care on platforms, which facilitate user interactions and user-generated content, to be reasonable and proportionate in keeping their users safe. It is clear that the incel communities are perpetuating online harms through their skewed alienating and discriminatory ideological world views, but where the content does not meet the threshold for hate speech, extremism or terrorism, it is often left unchecked. This then leaves vulnerable and disillusioned young men susceptible to the incel subculture as well as being potentially distressing to others who stumble across the materials. There is also the risk that particular terms or words used in unharmful and appropriate contexts could also be deemed offensive and unproblematic users banned as a result. Others may just dismiss incel philosophies as satire or too ridiculous to have any merit, overlooking how this contributes to the normalisation of misogyny and men's violence against women. Such 'jokes', not unique to incel spaces, are often presented as the right to exercise freedom of expression and part of the community culture where anything goes. Even where language subordinates, marginalises and harms, there are those that critique the use of legal regulation to tackle it. Judith Butler noted in 1997, in regard to the effects of speech, there is a gap between the intention of the speaker and its effect on the recipient – not having the intention to harm often being the essence of minimising the effects of abusive language online (Butler, 1997). For Butler, there should be no restrictions on hate speech as this could inadvertently work to silence those who would otherwise be stimulated to challenge it by what Butler refers to as 'resignifying' and 'restaging' it. In allowing such content to thrive, discriminations become more accepted and validated, and even though opportunities to change the meaning of language would be lost if it was automatically banned, or not being provided

with a platform in the first instance, ultimately this does protect people from being subjected to the harms caused from such speech. In addition, it removes the emotional labour of individuals, often persons from marginalised communities, having to call it out and educate others about their oppressions. Furthermore, the manipulation of speech is something that the incel communities are experts in, having created their own peculiar vernacular, hence a broadened understanding of the legal but harmful content involving subjective harms, which is currently undefined within the forthcoming legislation, is needed. A more tailored response is required taking into consideration to context, the impacts and the freedom of speech tensions. There is a current loophole within the proposed law, that protections for free speech could result in perverse outcomes, where a user could complain that legal racist, sexist, homophobic or transphobic content has been removed and therefore should be re-uploaded on a platform.

In addition, removal could force content on to more obscure places online and does not tackle the core of harmful ideologies. Although the larger companies such as Facebook, Twitter and Instagram are self-regulating and will be held to account by this law, smaller platforms whose ethos is about inspiring hatred and offline harm, such as 4chan, 8chan, Bitchute, and Gab, will evade these safeguards. It is these platforms that could absorb incels should they be unable to post their content on the mainstream sites, and which could impact on them becoming more isolated and extreme in their world views and actions. Therefore, these are societal issues that technological fixes alone will not be able to solve.

A Way Forward? Beyond the Manosphere

The aim of many incels is to ascend from inceldom; this means leaving the community and the blackpill behind, often by successfully entering into a romantic and sexual relationship with a woman. They grow out of the nihilistic perspective and are able to interact in a healthy way with women. Although for some who would consider themselves to have ascended, to be an ex-incel, the legacy of the blackpill ideology remains, and simply being in a romantic relationship with a woman is insufficient in enabling them to completely rethink their world view. Labelling and demonising incels could inadvertently exacerbate the risks and overlooks the individuals behind the term, many of whom are vulnerable and in need of support away from the toxicity of the manosphere. In the worst-case scenario, a self-fulfilling prophecy of being a threat and dangerous could come to fruition. My interviewees who claimed to be ex-incels talked about how the sense of belonging that they thought they were obtaining from being part of the incel community was actually a fallacy; however, society's treatment of them, and the resulting reaction to them being incel, also intensified the problem:

> Since I've left the blackpill, I'd say that sense of belonging/support is only an illusion, and that the blackpill (and TRP) is a cult. There are no benefits to joining an online hate group (I didn't realise it until I left it). Think of it this way: what are the benefits to joining a cult? Your already poor social skills become worse, you become

> more hateful and bitter, and it'll actually guarantee that you'll die alone and never find a relationship … but society gets the criminal it deserves. Society should realise that although online cults like the blackpill are extremely harmful, incels themselves have a lot of mental, emotional and personal issues that shouldn't be ignored in young men (which unfortunately are). Yes incels do talk crazy shit like killing and raping women, killing Chads and other ridiculous bullshit, but what created that in the first place? Social isolation, bullying and self-esteem issues, too much ideal standards for men, a society that demonises them, women and girls not being held accountable for their actions, emasculation of men in society and therefore a lack of a health role model, men's mental health issues not being addressed, combine this with the social effects of the internet, all this leads to the rise of incels. (Tom)

It is interesting that the justification narratives remain in Tom's accounts, providing excuses for the abusive language and behaviours and placing the blame elsewhere rather than holding the community accountable. Men are undeniably experiencing societal harms, both psychologically and physically, but talking about violence as a natural reaction negates any individual agency and validates the violence. It is possible to address the real men's issues leading young men to seek out support, and show sympathies for them, without condoning or excusing violent behaviours.

For Tom, proper socialisation and a healthy perspective of masculinity is key to protecting young men from inceldom:

> Young boys are feeling increasingly lost, unaddressed and facing social isolation, leading to inceldom. Granted not all of them do identify as incels, but most are going through issues and are in a situation that could easily make them incels (which is further harming them to a near-irreversible damage). They're growing whether you like it or not. I don't really know how society should be treating incels, the best thing would be to make sure young boys don't fall into this downward spiral of hatred and radicalisation by better socialisation, more acceptable of healthy masculinity in an increasingly anti-male hostile feminist society. (Tom)

Despite stating that he is an ex-incel, though, Tom sadly still holds views that allude to the incel philosophy of society being in favour of women and feminism being averse to men.

John claims to have ascended – *I knew how to fix my issues and managed to get few good women in my life fixing myself*. Positive interactions with (good) women assisted with John stopping self-identifying as an incel. John's self-awareness about how to resolve his problems are, however, not unique. It is well established in incel communities that forming relationships with women (who are not family members)

is a way out of inceldom, with romantic relationships the most prized – and vilified depending on the thread – simultaneously, there is the rejection of women because the blackpill has made incels feel that they are incapable of attracting love and intimacy from women. This vicious cycle of wanting and hating what is considered to be unattainable sustains the incel community and maintains the self-identification of individual incels. Uncomfortably, women are presented as both the problem and the solution to incel. Furthermore, John's interpretation of what a good woman is unclear; this does allude, however, to the fantasy of women as perfect rather than being fallible human beings.

For those who still identify as incel, the barriers to intimacy remain a core factor of why they remain within the community:

> I believe something has gone wrong in our society when we see a large number of people who desire companionship who can't get it. The hate for the other from other incels are becoming a concern but I believe most analyses point out the misogyny and not seem to show concern for the incel and look at violence and hatred with a black and white perspective rather than proposing solutions that can help incels. They need friends that can help them out of their emotional rut but they are stuck because they struggle to make friends that could help them possibly find a partner. (Carl)

It is somewhat reassuring to know that Carl wants to move on from being an incel, and the reason behind this is because he would like to have a healthier attitude towards women:

> I am looking to move away from the incel community and not identify as an incel as I don't want to see myself resentful towards women even if I struggle to have a relationship with them. (Carl)

Ben also critiqued mainstream media; he felt that the trope of girls being attracted to the 'bad boy' is encouraged, and that virginity is viewed as a negative:

> Productivity and education should be more valued by young boys rather than being popular and having success with girls. Films should stop portraying the popular guy as one who avoids education, does drugs, but still has success with girls. They should put on the pedestal the guy who works, studies hard and have success with girls. The attitude of people towards incel should be that of stop doing virgin-shaming. (Ben)

A theme I have considered throughout this book is the link between incels and mental health. The vague assertion generalising that all incels are mentally ill, however, fails to consider the complex relationship incels have with mental health

and self-worth. Incels believe that they have failed at being men, or that society perceives them as failures, which has resulted in detrimental impacts upon incel's self-esteem. The expectations of hegemonic masculinity stifling men's emotional lives and men's mental health often remains an under reported issue. In not meeting the hegemonic masculine standard, incels devalue themselves as inferior and subhuman, which is internalised and at the core of the incel identity. Society does place importance on looks, with specific idealised masculine and feminine physiques, and white and able-bodied hierarchies. We are expected to always look our best, and filters can hide our flaws online but not offline. Despite the challenges to this culture by the body positivity and inclusivity movements, the pressure to be attractive has become an obsession with incels, who feel outside of such initiatives.

Not every self-identifying incel is suffering with mental health issues; however, the indication is that there are many who do or have previously done so. The link between neurodiversity and incels is also compelling, though greater research is needed to establish this further, and certainly, there are other vulnerabilities present in incels aside from autism spectrum disorder (ASD). There are a concerning high volume of threads and posts asking members if they are or have been suicidal, along with suicidal ideation expressed throughout the community. Depression and loneliness are common themes discussed and are noted as expected outcomes of adopting the blackpill, in which accepting the life of an incel means embracing misery and hopelessness. Seeking the help of mental health professionals like psychologists and psychiatrists is discouraged as they are distrusted, particularly as these roles are associated with women. Those who have interacted with mental health professionals report that their encounters have been unhelpful and unproductive, with only a few stating anything positive had been derived from engaging such assistance. There are legitimate mental health problems, vulnerabilities and suffering described by incels; however, there are men who visit incel forums seeking advice and support from others who can empathise due to also struggling with relationships and the construct of masculinity, only to assimilate into an echo chamber of bitterness, resentment and aggression.

Incels, rather than being a contemporary aberration of misogynistic extremism, are founded upon the rhetoric of twentieth-century men's movements. Incel communities are spaces of paradox, turmoil and contradictions, rather than a homogeneous entity. The misogyny and dehumanisation of women presented by incels are indicative of wider patriarchal Western society, amplified through the echo chamber effect. The war against women is not virtual, it has been in effect both blatantly and surreptitiously offline for generations, controlling women's lives, but is now simultaneously occurring online as well. This war increases in prevalence whenever women make equality gains and/or prolifically challenge men's violence against them. Incels do provide a valid critique of the narrow perspective of the ideal men are expected to meet in order to be a 'man' and its accompanying detrimental effects; however, the framing of it as a problem caused by women and feminism overlooks the real enemy, the systems of oppression that enforce rigid gender expectations, that feminism is actually seeking to dismantle.

Suggested Responses

Those who identify as incel: Active listening, not instantly shutting down their perspectives, dismantling of their world view over time – offer different, informed perspectives – these might not be positively responded to immediately, but many incels are well educated and will have trouble refuting legitimate scientific evidence if they are repeatedly presented with it. Question how the community makes them feel? The chances are it does not make them happy so explore what does/will.

Young men and boys: Need to speak with and engage young men and boys about men's violence against women in a way that doesn't demonise them, but which also doesn't diminish the reality of women's lived experiences. It is a matter of getting the balance right, which is a major challenge, with worrying consequences if unsuccessful, such as being influenced by incel rhetoric. Attacking, judging or blaming men for their privilege and for being oppressors, using terms like toxic masculinity – even though it refers to a harmful type of masculinity rather than being male in itself, rather than healthy and unhealthy models of manhood – can be alienating. Downplaying, the extent of abuses that women suffer at the hands of men, however, could lead to a failure to take the issue seriously, and fuel the manosphere's narrative, that women exaggerate or even fabricate their victimisation. Perceived criticisms of the male sense of identity could lead young men and boys to become defensive and infuriated at a society that blames them for actions they may not have engaged in, such that they become increasingly reclusive and anti-feminist ideologies are appealing. Indeed, anti-gender sentiment has been suggested as a potential entry into more extremist views.

Men and women should not be pitched against each other in a false dichotomy of men versus women; therefore, making men part of the solution is paramount. Both second-wave feminism and the men's liberation movement initially recognised that rigid-gendered roles harmed both women and men; however, there was always a dissonance between them due to seemingly opposing interests. Without detracting from the incredible progress achieved and the foundations established by second-wave feminists, the development of more inclusive and intersectional third- and fourth-wave feminisms provides enhanced opportunities to be more accessible to all genders. As the title of bell hooks' influential text states: 'Feminism is for Everybody'. It is about engaging men in a movement to end sexism, sexist exploitation and oppression (hooks, 2000, p. 1) and inviting them to hold themselves to higher standards. Therefore, men should be part of the conversation about sexual harassment and assault, and they do not need to lead the debate, but they can listen and support the experiences of women and girls. Most men aren't violent, but enough are, and certainly, all men have a role in tackling the problem.

Policymakers, the media and law enforcement all need to tread carefully with well-planned and informed interventions that take into account the disillusionment of contemporary young men, the humanity and vulnerability of individuals within incel communities, as well as the threats posed from the harmful ideologies to women, society and to incels themselves, as well as to Western democracy. I hope that this book contributes to these discussions.

This page intentionally left blank

References

Abbas, T., & Awan, I. (2015). Limits of UK counterterrorism policy and its implications for Islamophobia and far right extremism. *International Journal for Crime, Justice and Social Democracy*, *4*(3), 16–29.

Adams, E. B., & Briscoe, M. L. (1971). *Up against the wall, mother … on women's liberation*. Glencoe, IL: Glencoe Press.

Allan, J. A. (2016). Phallic affect, or why men's rights activists have feelings. *Men and Masculinities*, *19*(1), 22–41.

Allen, L. (2005). *Sexual subjects: Young people, sexuality and education*. New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan.

Amnesty International. (2018). Why Twitter is a toxic place for women. Retrieved from https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/research/2018/03/online-violence-against-women-chapter-1/

Anderson, E. (2005). Orthodox and inclusive masculinity: Competing masculinities among heterosexual men in a feminized terrain. *Sociological Perspectives*, *48*(3), 337–355.

Baele, S. J., Brace, L., & Coan, T. G. (2019). From "Incel" to "Saint": Analyzing the violent worldview behind the 2018 Toronto attack. *Terrorism and Political Violence*, 1–25. https://doi.org/10.1080/09546553.2019.1638256

Bakker, E., & de Graaf, B. (2011). Preventing lone wolf terrorism: Some CT approaches addressed. *Perspectives on Terrorism*, *5*(5/6), 43–50.

Band-Winterstein, T., Doron, I., & Naim, S. (2014). 'I take them with me' – Reflexivity in sensitive research. *Reflective Practice*, *15*(4), 530–539.

Banet-Weiser, S. (2015). Keynote address: Media, markets, gender: Economies of visibility in a neoliberal moment. *The Communication Review*, *18*(1), 53–70.

Banet-Weiser, S., & Miltner, K. M. (2016). # MasculinitySoFragile: Culture, structure, and networked misogyny. *Feminist Media Studies*, *16*(1), 171–174.

Bareket, O., Kahalon, R., Shnabel, N., & Glick, P. (2018). The Madonna-whore dichotomy: Men who perceive women's nurturance and sexuality as mutually exclusive endorse patriarchy and show lower relationship satisfaction. *Sex Roles*, *79*(9), 519–532.

Baumeister, R. F., & Dhavale, D. (2001). Two sides of romantic rejection. In M. R. Leary (Ed.), *Interpersonal rejection* (pp. 55–71). New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

Beauchamp, Z. (2019). Our incel problem. *Vox*. Retrieved from https://www.vox.com/thehighlight/2019/4/16/18287446/incel-definition-reddit. Accessed on April 23, 2019.

Beauchamp, Z. (2020). The raging controversy over "Bernie Bros" and the so-called dirtbag left explained. *Vox*. Retrieved from https://www.vox.com/policy-and-politics/2020/3/9/21168312/bernie-bros-bernie-sanders-chapo-trap-house-dirtbag-left. Accessed on March 9, 2020.

Becker, H. S. (1963). *Outsiders: Studies in the sociology of deviance*. New York, NY: The Free Press.

Bem, S. L. (1981). Gender schema theory: A cognitive account of sex typing. *Psychological Review*, *88*(4), 354.

Berger, J. M. (2018). *Extremism*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Berry, J. M., & Sobieraj, S. (2013). *The outrage industry: Political opinion media and the new incivility*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

Bishop, J. (2013). The effect of de-individuation of the Internet Troller on Criminal Procedure implementation: An interview with a Hater. *International Journal of Cyber Criminology*, *7*(1), 28–48.

Blake, M. (2015). Mad men: Inside the Men's Rights Movement – And the army of misogynists and trolls it spawned. *Mother Jones*. January/February issue.

Blevins, K. (2018). bell hooks and consciousness-raising: Argument for a fourth wave of feminism. In J. R.Vickery & T. Everbach (Eds.), *Mediating misogyny* (pp. 91–108). Cham: Palgrave Macmillan.

Bloom, M. (2011). Bombshells: Women and terror. *Gender Issues*, *28*(1), 1–21.

Bly, R. (1990). *Iron John: A book about men*. Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley.

Bolgan, S., Mosca, D., McLean, C., & Rusconi, E. (2016). Systemizers are better code-breakers: Self-reported systemizing predicts code-breaking performance in expert hackers and naïve participants. *Frontiers in Human Neuroscience*, *10*, 229.

Borum, R., Cornell, D. G., Modzeleski, W., & Jimerson, S. R. (2010). What can be done about school shootings? A review of the evidence. *Educational Researcher*, *39*(1), 27–37.

Bourgois, P. (1996). In search of masculinity: Violence, respect and sexuality among Puerto Rican crack dealers in East Harlem. *The British Journal of Criminology*, *36*(3), 412–427.

Boyd, S. B. (2004). Demonizing mothers: Fathers' rights discourses in child custody law reform processes. *Journal of the Motherhood Initiative for Research and Community Involvement*, *6*(1), 52–74.

Braithwaite, J. (1989). Criminological theory and organizational crime. *Justice Quarterly*, *6*(3), 333–358.

Bratich, J., & Banet-Weiser, S. (2019). From pick-up artists to incels: Con (fidence) games, networked misogyny, and the failure of neoliberalism. *International Journal of Communication*, *13*, 25.

Bresnahan, J., Inoue, M. Y., & Kagawa, N. (2006). Players and whiners? Perceptions of sex stereotyping in anime in Japan and the US. *Asian Journal of Communication*, *16*(2), 207–217.

Bright, J. (2018). Explaining the emergence of political fragmentation on social media: The role of ideology and extremism. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, *23*(1), 17–33.

Brown, K. E. (2013). Women and emerging counter-terror measures. In M. L. Satterthwaite & J. Huckerby (Eds.), *Gender, national security, and counter-terrorism: Human rights perspectives* (p. 36). London: Routledge.

Brown, S. (2006). The criminology of hybrids: Rethinking crime and law in technosocial networks. *Theoretical Criminology*, *10*(2), 223–244.

Buchwald, E., Fletcher, P. R., & Roth, M. (Eds.). (1993). *Transforming a rape culture* (p. 9). Minneapolis, MN: Milkweed Editions.

Burgess, E. O., Donnelly, D., Dillard, J., & Davis, R. (2001). Surfing for sex: Studying involuntary celibacy using the internet. *Sexuality and Culture*, *5*(3), 5–30.

Butler, J. (1990). *Gender trouble: Feminism and the subversion of identity*. New York, NY: Routledge.

Butler, J. (1997). *Excitable speech: A politics of the performative*. New York, NY: Routledge.

Chailand, G., & Blin, A. (2007). "Introduction." In G. Chaliand & A. Bun (Eds.), *The history of terrorism: From antiquity to Al Qaeda* (pp. 1–11). Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

Chakraborti, N., & Garland, J. (Eds.). (2015). *Responding to hate crime: The case for connecting policy and research*. Briston: The Policy Press.

Chang, W. (2020). The monstrous-feminine in the incel imagination: Investigating the representation of women as "femoids" on/r/Braincels. *Feminist Media Studies*, 1–17. https://doi.org/10.1080/14680777.2020.1804976

Cohen, S. (1972). *Folk devils and moral panics*. London: Routledge.

Collier, R. (1998). *Masculinities, crime and criminology*. London: Sage.
Collins, B. (2018). A horror tale of male entitlement: Jack the ripper and "His" shadow, the incel movement. *Institute for Public Policy Research Journal*, *13*, 10–16.
Conley, J. (2020). *Efficacy, nihilism, and toxic masculinity online: Digital misogyny in the incel subculture*. Doctoral dissertation, The Ohio State University.
Connell, R. W. (1987). *Gender and power: Society, the person and sexual politics*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
Connell, R. W. (1995). *Masculinities*. Cambridge: Polity.
Connell, R. W., & Messerschmidt, J. W. (2005). Hegemonic masculinity: Rethinking the concept. *Gender & Society*, *19*(6), 829–859.
Conway, M. (2020). Routing the extreme right: Challenges for social media platforms. *The RUSI Journal*, *165*(1), 108–113.
Conway, M., Khawaja, M., Lakhani, S., & Reffin, J. (2020). A snapshot of the Syrian Jihadi online ecology: Differential disruption, community strength, and preferred other platforms. *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, 1–17. https://doi.org/10.1080/1057610X.2020.1866736
Conway, M., Khawaja, M., Lakhani, S., Reffin, J., Robertson, A., & Weir, D. (2017). Disrupting Daesh: Measuring takedown of online terrorist material and it's impacts. *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, *42*(1–2), 141–160.
Cottee, S. (2020). Incel (E) motives: Resentment, shame and revenge. *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, *44*(2), 93–114.
Crawford, B. (2020). The influence of memes on far-right radicalisation. In *Radical-right responses to COVID-19*. Hannover: Ibidem-verlag. Retrieved from https://www.radicalrightanalysis.com/2020/06/09/the-influence-of-memes-on-far-right-radicalisation/.
Crenshaw, K. (1990). Mapping the margins: Intersectionality, identity politics, and violence against women of color. *Stanford Law Review*, *43*, 1241.
DeKeseredy, W. S., & Dragiewicz, M. (2007). Understanding the complexities of feminist perspectives on woman abuse: A commentary on Donald G. Dutton's rethinking domestic violence. *Violence Against Women*, *13*(8), 874–884.
DiFranzo, D., & Gloria-Garcia, K. (2017). Filter bubbles and fake news. *XRDS: Crossroads, The ACM Magazine for Students*, *23*(3), 32–35.
Dobash, R. E., & Dobash, R. (1979). *Violence against wives: A case against the patriarchy*. New York, NY: Free Press.
Dragiewicz, M. (2008). Patriarchy reasserted: Fathers' rights and anti-VAWA activism. *Feminist Criminology*, *3*(2), 121–144.
Dragiewicz, M. (2011). *Equality with a vengeance: Men's rights groups, battered women, and antifeminist backlash*. Boston, MA: Northeastern University Press.
Fahrenthold, D. (2016). Trump recorded having extremely lewd conversation about women in 2005. *The Washington Post*. Retrieved from https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/trump-recorded-having-extremely-lewd-conversation-aboutwomen-in-2005/2016/10/07/3b9ce776-8cb4-11e6-bf8a-3d26847eeed4_story.html?noredirect=on&utm_term=.4811a0badbe2. Accessed on October 8, 2016.
Fahs, B. (2008). The radical possibilities of Valerie Solanas. *Feminist Studies*, *34*(3), 591–617.
Faludi, S. (1991). *Backlash: The undeclared war against American women*. New York, NY: Three Rivers Press.
Farenthold, D. (2016). Donald Trump used money donated for charity to buy himself a Tim Tebow-signed football helmet. *The Washington Post*. Retrieved from https://www.washingtonpost.com/gdpr-consent/?next_url=https%3a%2f%2fwww.washingtonpost.com%2fnews%2fpost-politics%2fwp%2f2016%2f07%2f01%2fdonald-trump-used-money-donated-for-charity-to-buy-himself-a-tim-tebow-signed-football-helmet%2f. Accessed on July 1, 2016.

Farrell, T., Fernandez, M., Novotny, J., & Alani, H. (2019, June). Exploring misogyny across the manosphere in reddit. In *Proceedings of the 10th ACM conference on web science*, (pp. 87–96), May 27-30, Amsterdam, Netherlands.

Farrell, W. (1974). *The liberated man: Beyond masculinity. Freeing men and their relationships with women*. New York, NY: Random House.

Farrell, W. (1976). Women's liberation as men's liberation: Twenty-one examples. *The Forty-Nine Percent Majority, Supra Note*, 247.

Farrell, W. (1988). *Why men are the way they are*. New York, NY: G P Putnam's Sons.

Farrell, W. (1996). *The myth of male power*: *Why men are the disposable sex*. New York, NY: Berkeley Publishing Group.

Fasteau, M. F. (1974). *The male machine*. New York, NY: McGraw-Hill Companies.

Felson, R. B., & Paré, P. P. (2005). The reporting of domestic violence and sexual assault by nonstrangers to the police. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, *67*(3), 597–610.

Ferber, A. L. (1996). *White man falling: Race, gender, and white supremacy*. Washington, DC: Rowman & Littlefield.

Ferber, A. L., & Kimmel, M. S. (2008). The gendered face of terrorism. *Sociology Compass*, *2*(3), 870–887.

Fileborn, B., & Loney-Howes, R. (Eds.). (2019). *#MeToo and the politics of social change*. Cham: Springer Nature.

Foucault, M. (1978). *The history of sexuality: 1: The will to knowledge*. London: Penguin UK.

Freud, S. (1905). *Drei abhandlungen zur sexualtheorie* [*Three essays on the theory of sexuality*]. Berlin: Leipzig und Wien.

Freud, S. (1912). Über die allgemeinste erniedrigung des liebeslebens [The most prevalent form of degradation in erotic life]. *Jahrbuch für Psychoanalytische und Psychopathologische Forschungen*, *4*, 40–50.

Ganor, B. (2005). Terrorism as a strategy of psychological warfare. *Journal of Aggression, Maltreatment & Trauma*, *9*(1–2), 33–43.

Gavey, N. (2005). *Just sex? The cultural scaffolding of rape*. London: Routledge.

Ging, D. (2017). Alphas, betas, and incels: Theorizing the masculinities of the manosphere. *Men and Masculinities*, *22*(4), 638–657.

Goffman, E. (1959). *The presentation of self in everyday life*. Garden City, NY: Doubleday.

Goffman, E. (1963). Stigma and social identity. In T. L. Anderson (Ed.), *Understanding deviance: Connecting classical and contemporary perspectives* (pp. 256–265). London: Routledge.

Goldsmith, A., & Brewer, R. (2015). Digital drift and the criminal interaction order. *Theoretical Criminology*, *19*(1), 112–130.

Gotell, L., & Dutton, E. (2016). Sexual violence in the 'manosphere': Antifeminist men's rights discourses on rape. *International Journal for Crime, Justice and Social Democracy*, *5*(2), 65.

Hamm, M. S. (2002). *In bad company: America's terrorist underground*. Boston, MA: Northeastern University Press.

Hanisch, C. (1969). The personal is political. In S. Firestone & A. Koedt (Eds.), *Notes from the second year – Women's liberation: Major writings of the radical feminists* (pp. 113–116). New York, NY: Pamphlet published by S. Firestone and A. Koedt.

Hanisch, C. (1975). Men's liberation. In Redstockings (Ed.), *Feminist revolution* (pp. 60–63). New York, NY: Random House.

Hawley, G. (2018). *Making sense of the alt-right*. New York, NY: Columbia University Press.

Helfgott, J. B. (2008). The influence of technology, media, and popular culture on criminal behavior: Copycat crime and cybercrime. In *Criminal behavior: theories, typologies and criminal justice*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Henry, N., & Powell, A. (2015). Embodied harms: Gender, shame, and technology-facilitated sexual violence. *Violence Against Women*, *21*(6), 758–779.

Herman, D. F. (1989). The rape culture. In J. Freeman (Ed.), *Women: A feminist perspective* (pp. 45–53). Houston, TX: Mayfield Publishing Company.

Hinduja, S. (2008). Deindividuation and internet software piracy. *CyberPsychology & Behavior*, *11*(4), 391–398.

Hoffman, B., Ware, J., & Shapiro, E. (2020). Assessing the threat of incel violence. *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, *43*(7), 565–587.

Holland, J., Ramazanoglu, C., Sharpe, S., & Thomson, R. (1998). *The male in the head: Young people, heterosexuality and power*. London: The Tufnell Press.

Holt, T. J. (2010). Examining the role of technology in the formation of deviant subcultures. *Social Science Computer Review*, *28*, 466–481.

hooks, b. (2000). *Feminism is for everybody: Passionate politics*. London: Pluto Press.

hooks, b. (2004). *The will to change: Men, masculinity, and love*. New York, NY: Beyond Words/Atria Books.

hooks, b. (2013). *Writing beyond race: Living theory and practice*. London: Routledge.

Jackson, S. (Ed.). (1999). *Heterosexuality in question*. London: Sage.

Jaki, S., De Smedt, T., Gwóźdź, M., Panchal, R., Rossa, A., & De Pauw, G. (2019). Online hatred of women in the incels. Me forum: Linguistic analysis and automatic detection. *Journal of Language Aggression and Conflict*, *7*(2), 240–268.

Jane, E. A. (2014). "Your a ugly, whorish, slut" understanding E-bile. *Feminist Media Studies*, *14*(4), 531–546.

Jane, E. A. (2016). *Misogyny online: A short (and brutish) history*. New York, NY: Sage.

Jones, C., Trott, V., & Wright, S. (2020). Sluts and soyboys: MGTOW and the production of misogynistic online harassment. *New Media & Society*, *22*(10), 1903–1921.

Jurecic, A. (2007). Neurodiversity. *College English*, *69*(5), 421–442.

Kachel, S., Steffens, M. C., & Niedlich, C. (2016). Traditional masculinity and femininity: Validation of a new scale assessing gender roles. *Frontiers in Psychology*, *7*, 956.

Karner, T. (1996). Fathers, sons, and Vietnam: masculinity and betrayal in the life narratives of Vietnam veterans with post traumatic stress disorder. *American Studies*, *37*(1), 63–94.

Katz, J. (2006). *Macho paradox: Why some men hurt women and how all men can help*. Naperville, IL: Sourcebooks, Inc.

Kelly, L. (1987). The continuum of sexual violence. In J. Hanmer & M. Maynard (Eds.), *Women, violence and social control* (pp. 46–60). London: Palgrave Macmillan.

Kim, R. (2014). New mass murder, old lesson. *The Nation*. Retrieved from https://www.thenation.com/article/archive/new-mass-murder-old-lesson/. Accessed on June 23–30, 2014.

Kim, M. E. (2020). The carceral creep: Gender-based violence, race, and the expansion of the punitive state, 1973–1983. *Social Problems*, *67*(2), 251–269.

Kimmel, M. (2008). Profiling school shooters and shooters' schools: The cultural contexts of aggrieved entitlement and restorative masculinity. In B. Agger & T. W. Luke (Eds.), *There is a gunman on campus: Tragedy and terror at Virginia Tech* (pp. 65–78). Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.

Kimmel, M. (2010). *Misframing men: The politics of contemporary masculinities*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.

Kimmel, M. (2017). *Angry white men: American masculinity at the end of an era*. Paris: Hachette.

Kingdon, A. (2020). *I predict a riot: An analysis of white supremacist propaganda in the wake of the George Floyd murder*. Centre for the Analysis of the Radical Right. Retrieved from https://www.radicalrightanalysis.com/2020/06/10/i-predict-a-riot-an-analysis-of-white-supremacist-propaganda-in-the-wake-of-the-george-floyd-murder/. Accessed on June 10, 2020.

Klein, J. (2012). *The bully society: School shootings and the crisis of bullying in America's schools*. New York, NY: NYU Press.

Koulouris, T. (2018). Online misogyny and the alternative right: Debating the undebatable. *Feminist Media Studies*, *18*(4), 750–761.
Kozinets, R. V. (2015). Netnography. In P. H. Ang & R. Mansell (Eds.), *The international encyclopedia of digital communication and society* (pp. 1–8). Oxford: Blackwell-Wiley.
Kozinets, R. V. (2019). *Netnography: The essential guide to qualitative social media research*. London: Sage.
Kreis, R. (2017). The 'Tweet Politics' of President Trump. *Journal of Language and Politics*, *16*(4), 607–618.
Kupers, T. A. (2005). Toxic masculinity as a barrier to mental health treatment in prison. *Journal of Clinical Psychology*, *61*(6), 713–724.
Larcombe, W. (2005). *Compelling engagements: Feminism, rape law and romance fiction*. Sydney: The Federation Press.
Launius, C., & Hassel, H. (2018). *Threshold concepts in women's and gender studies: Ways of seeing, thinking, and knowing*. New York, NY: Routledge.
Lavorgna, A., & Sugiura, L. (2020). Direct contacts with potential interviewees when carrying out online ethnography on controversial and polarized topics: A loophole in ethics guidelines. *International Journal of Social Research Methodology*, 1–7. https://doi.org/10.1080/13645579.2020.1855719
Lazar, M. M. (2007). Feminist critical discourse analysis: Articulating a feminist discourse praxis. *Critical Discourse Studies*, *4*(2), 141–164.
Levy, A. (2010). *Female chauvinist pigs: Women and the rise of raunch culture*. New York, NY: Black Incorporated.
Lewis, H. (2020). *Difficult women: A history of feminism in 11 fights*. London: Random House.
Lewis, R., Rowe, M., Wiper, C. (2017). Online abuse of feminists as an emerging form of violence against women and girls. *British Journal of Criminology*, *57*(6), 1462–1481.
Lilly, M. (2016). *'The world is not a safe place for men': The representational politics of the manosphere*. Doctoral dissertation, Université d'Ottawa/University of Ottawa.
Lumsden, K. (2019). '"I want to kill you in front of your children" is not a threat. It's an expression of a desire': Discourses of online abuse, trolling and violence on r/MensRights. In K. Lumsden & E. Harmer (Eds.), *Online othering* (pp. 91–115). London: Palgrave Macmillan.
MacKinnon, C. A. (1984). Not a moral issue. *Yale Law & Policy Review*, *2*, 321–345.
Maddison, S. (1999). Private men, public anger: The men's rights movement in Australia. *Journal of Interdisciplinary Gender Studies: JIGS*, *4*(2), 39–52.
Maher, S. (2014). From Portsmouth to Kobane: The British jihadis fighting for Isis. *The New Statesman*. Retrieved from https://www.newstatesman.com/2014/10/portsmouth-kobane. Accessed on November 6, 2014.
Malamuth, N. M. (1981). Rape proclivity among males. *Social Issues*, *37*(4), 138–157.
Manne, K. (2018). *Down girl: The logic of misogyny*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
Mantilla, K. (2013). Gendertrolling: Misogyny adapts to new media. *Feminist Studies*, *39*(2), 563–570.
March, E. (2019). Psychopathy, sadism, empathy, and the motivation to cause harm: New evidence confirms malevolent nature of the internet troll. *Personality and Individual Differences*, *141*, 133–137.
Marwick, A. E., & Caplan, R. (2018). Drinking male tears: Language, the manosphere, and networked harassment. *Feminist Media Studies*, *18*(4), 543–559.
Masataka, N. (2018). Neurodiversity and artistic performance characteristic of children with autism spectrum disorder. *Frontiers in Psychology*, *9*, 2594.
Massanari, A. (2017). #Gamergate and The Fappening: How Reddit's algorithm, governance, and culture support toxic technocultures. *New Media & Society*, *19*(3), 329–346.
Matza, D. (1964). *Delinquency and drift*. New York, NY: Routledge.

McCann, H. (2020). Is there anything "toxic" about femininity? The rigid femininities that keep us locked in. *Psychology & Sexuality*, 1–14. https://doi.org/10.1080/19419899.2020.1785534

Megarry, J. (2014, November). Online incivility or sexual harassment? Conceptualising women's experiences in the digital age. *Women's Studies International Forum*, *47*, 46–55.

Menzie, L. (2020). Stacys, Beckys, and Chads: The construction of femininity and hegemonic masculinity within Incel rhetoric. *Psychology & Sexuality*, 1–17. https://doi.org/10.1080/19419899.2020.1806915

Merton, R. K. (1948). The self-fulfilling prophecy. *The Antioch Review*, *8*(2), 193–210.

Messerschmidt, J. W. (1994). Schooling, masculinities and youth crime by white boys. In T. Newburn & E. A. Stanko (Eds.), *Just boys doing business? Men, masculinities and crime* (pp. 81–99). London: Routledge.

Messner, M. A. (1998). The limits of "the male sex role": An analysis of the Men's Liberation and Men's Rights Movements' discourse. *Gender & Society*, *12*(3), 255–276.

Milner, R. M. (2013). FCJ-156 hacking the social: Internet memes, identity antagonism, and the logic of Lulz. *The Fibreculture Journal*, issue 22. Retrieved from https://twentytwo.fibreculturejournal.org/fcj-156-hacking-the-social-internet-memes-identity-antagonism-and-the-logic-of-lulz/

Moghaddam, F. M. (2005). The staircase to terrorism a psychological exploration. *American Psychologist*, *60*(2), 161–169.

Muschert, G. W. (2007). Research in school shootings. *Sociology Compass*, *1*(1), 60–80.

Nagle, A. (2017). *Kill all normies: Online culture wars from 4chan and Tumblr to Trump and the alt-right*. Lanham, WV: John Hunt Publishing.

Nayak, A. (2006). Displaced masculinities: Chavs, youth and class in the post-industrial city. *Sociology*, *40*(5), 813–831.

Neiwert, D. (2020). *Red pill blue pill: How to counteract the conspiracy theories that are killing us*. Lanham, WV: Prometheus Books.

Nelson, G. K. (1968). The concept of cult. *The Sociological Review*, *16*(3), 351–362.

Neumann, P. R. (2016). *Radicalized: New jihadists and the threat to the West*. London: Bloomsbury Publishing.

Nicholas, L., & Agius, C. (2018). #Notallmen, #Menenism, manospheres and unsafe spaces: Overt and subtle masculinism in anti-"PC" discourse. In L. Nicolas & C. Agius (Eds.), *The persistence of global masculinism* (pp. 31–59). Cham: Palgrave Macmillan.

O'Malley, R. L., Holt, K., & Holt, T. J. (2020). An exploration of the involuntary celibate (InCel) subculture online. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*. https://doi.org/10.1177088626052095962 5

Pain, R. (2014). Everyday terrorism: Connecting domestic violence and global terrorism. *Progress in Human Geography*, *38*(4), 531–550.

Palma, S. (2019). Entitled to a happy ending: Fairy-tale logic from "Beauty and the Beast" to the incel movement. *Marvels & Tales*, *33*(2), 319–337.

Papadamou, K., Zannettou, S., Blackburn, J., De Cristofaro, E., Stringhini, G., & Sirivianos, M. (2020). Understanding the incel community on youtube. *arXiv preprint arXiv:2001.08293*.

Parashar, S. (2011). Gender, jihad, and jingoism: Women as perpetrators, planners, and patrons of militancy in Kashmir. *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, *34*(4), 295–317.

Pariser, E. (2011). *The filter bubble: What the internet is hiding from you*. London: Penguin UK.

Paul, J. (2013). Madonna and whore: The many faces of Penelope in Camerini's Ulysses. In K. P. Nikoloutsos (Ed.), *Ancient Greek women in film* (pp. 139–162). Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Pearson, E. (2020). Gendered Reflections? Extremism in the UK's Radical Right and al-Muhajiroun Networks. *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, 1–24. https://doi.org/10.1080/1057610X.2020.1759270

Pearson, G. (1983). *Hooligan: A history of respectable fears*. London: Macmillan International Higher Education.

Penny, L. (2013). *Cybersexism: Sex, gender and power on the internet*. London: A&C Black.

Penny, L. (2014a). Let's call the Isla Vista killings what they were. *New Statesman*. Retrieved from https://www.newstatesman.com/lifestyle/2014/05/lets-call-isla-vista-killings-what-they-were-misogynist-extremism. Accessed on May 25, 2014.

Penny, L. (2014b). Mental illness does not excuse violent misogyny. *New Statesman*. Retrieved from https://www.newstatesman.com/politics/2014/05/mental-illness-does-not-excuse-violent-misogyny. Accessed on May 30, 2014.

Perry, B. (2001). *In the name of hate: Understanding hate crimes*. New York, NY: Routledge.

Phillips, W. (2015). *This is why we can't have nice things: Mapping the relationship between online trolling and mainstream culture*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Phipps, A. (2020). *Me, not you: The trouble with mainstream feminism*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.

Pitman, E. (2018). Misogyny is a human pyramid. *Meanjin*. Retrieved from https://meanjin.com.au/blog/misogyny-is-a-human-pyramid/. Accessed on January 15, 2018.

Pizzey, E. (2009). Practice report: A comparative study of battered women and violence-prone women. *Journal of Aggression, Conflict and Peace Research*, *1*(2), 53–62.

Pleck, J. H. (1974). Men's power with women, other men, and society. In P. P. Rieker & E. Carmen (Eds.), *The gender gap in psychotherapy* (pp. 79–89). Boston, MA: Springer.

Pleck, J. H. (1995). The gender role strain paradigm: An update. In R. F. Levant & W. S. Pollack (Eds.), *A new psychology of men* (pp. 11–32). New York, NY: Basic Books/Hachette Book Group.

Pomeroy, S. B. (1975). *Goddesses, whores, wives, and slaves: Women in classical antiquity*. New York, NY: Schocken.

Powell, A. (2010). *Sex, power and consent: Youth culture and the unwritten rules*. Melbourne: Cambridge University Press.

Powell, A., & Henry, N. (2017). *Sexual violence in a digital age*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.

Powell, A., Stratton, G., & Cameron, R. (2018). *Digital criminology: Crime and justice in digital society*. New York, NY: Routledge.

Powell, A., & Sugiura, L. (2018). Resisting rape culture in digital society. In W. S. DeKeseredy, C. M. Rennison & A. K. Hall-Sanchez (Eds.), *The Routledge international handbook of violence studies* (pp. 447–457). New York, NY: Routledge.

Regehr, K. (2020). In(cel) doctrination: How technologically facilitated misogyny moves violence off screens and on to streets. *New Media & Society*, *22*, 838–856. https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444820959019

Reitman, J. (2018). All-American Nazis: How a senseless double murder in Florida exposed the rise of an organized fascist youth movement in the United States. *Rolling Stone*. Retrieved from https://www.rollingstone.com/politics/news/all-american-nazis-fascist-youth-united-states-w519651. Accessed on May 2, 2018.

Rheingold, H. (1993). A slice of life in my virtual community. In L. M. Harasim (Ed.), *Global networks: Computers and international communication* (pp. 57–80). Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Ribeiro, M. H., Jhaver, S., Zannettou, S., Blackburn, J., De Cristofaro, E., Stringhini, G., & West, R. (2020). Does platform migration compromise content moderation? Evidence from r/The_Donald and r/Incels. Available at: *arXiv preprint arXiv:2010.10397*.

Ribeiro, M. H., Ottoni, R., West, R., Almeida, V. A., & Meira, W., Jr. (2020, January). Auditing radicalization pathways on YouTube. In *Proceedings of the 2020 conference on fairness, accountability, and transparency* (pp. 131–141).

Richter, G., & Richter, A. (2019). The incel killer and the threat to campus community. *Security*, *56*(3), 28–30.

Rip, B., Vallerand, R. J., & Lafrenière, M. A. K. (2012). Passion for a cause, passion for a creed: On ideological passion, identity threat, and extremism. *Journal of Personality*, *80*(3), 573–602.

Salojärvi, E., Rantanen, M., Nieminen, E., Juote, A., & Hanhela, H. (2020). The 'incel' phenomenon in the digital era – How echo chambers have fueled the incel movement. *Phil Archive*. Retrieved from https://philarchive.org/archive/SALTIP

Salter, A., & Blodgett, B. (2012). Hypermasculinity & dickwolves: The contentious role of women in the new gaming public. *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media*, *56*(3), 401–416.

Sawyer, J. (1970). On male liberation. *Liberation*, *15*(6, 7 & 8), 32–33.

Scaptura, M. N., & Boyle, K. M. (2020). Masculinity threat,"Incel" traits, and violent fantasies among heterosexual men in the United States. *Feminist Criminology*, *15*(3), 278–298.

Schmitz, R. M., & Kazyak, E. (2016). Masculinities in cyberspace: An analysis of portrayals of manhood in men's rights activist websites. *Social Sciences*, *5*(2), 18.

Schulte, S. R. (2011). Surfing feminism's online wave: The internet and the future of feminism. *Feminist Studies*, *37*(3), 727–744.

Scott, M. B., & Lyman, S. M. (1968). Accounts. *American Sociological Review*, *33*(February), 46–62.

Scotto di Carlo, G. (2020). Trumping twitter: Sexism in President Trump's tweets. *Journal of Language and Politics*, *19*(1), 48–70.

Seigfried-Spellar, K. C., O'Quinn, C. L., & Treadway, K. N. (2015). Assessing the relationship between autistic traits and cyberdeviancy in a sample of college students. *Behaviour & Information Technology*, *34*(5), 533–542.

Shafritz, J. M., Gibbons, E. F., & Scott, G. E. (1991). *Almanac of modern terrorism*. New York, NY: Facts on File.

Silke, A. (2018). The study of terrorism and counterterrorism. In A. Silke (Ed.), *Routledge handbook of terrorism and counterterrorism* (pp. 1–10). New York, NY: Routledge.

Snider, N. (2018). "Why didn't she walk away?" Silence, complicity, and the subtle force of toxic femininity. *Contemporary Psychoanalysis*, *54*(4), 763–777.

Solanas, V. (1968). *SCUM manifesto*. Self published document.

Southern Poverty Law Center. (n.d.). Alt-right. Retrieved from https://www.splcenter.org/fighting-hate/extremist-files/ideology/alt-right

Stanko, E. A. (1985). *Intimate intrusions: Women's experiences of male violence*. London: Routledge.

Stanko, E. A. (1990). *Everyday violence: How women and men experience sexual and physical danger*. London: HarperCollins.

Stark, E. (2007). *Coercive control: How men entrap women in personal life*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

Stokel-Walker, C. (2021, March 13). Anti-feminism is route to alt-right. *New Scientist*, *249*(3325), 12.

Straus, M. A. (1999). The controversy over domestic violence by women: A methodological, theoretical, and sociology of science analysis. In X. B. Arriaga & S. Oskamp (Eds.), *Violence in intimate relationships* (pp. 17–44). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Sugiura, L. (2018). *Respectable deviance and purchasing medicine online: Opportunities and risks for consumers*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.

Sugiura, L. (2021). Engaging with Incels: Reflexivity, Identity and the Female Cybercrime Ethnographic Researcher. In A. Lavorgna & T. Holt (Eds.), *Researching Cybercrimes* (pp. 473–492). Cham: Palgrave Macmillan.

Sugiura, L., Wiles, R., & Pope, C. (2017). Ethical challenges in online research: Public/private perceptions. *Research Ethics*, *13*(3–4), 184–199.

Suler, J. (2005). The online disinhibition effect. *International Journal of Applied Psychoanalytic Studies*, *2*(2), 184–188.

Sykes, G., & Matza, D. (1957). Techniques of neutralization: A theory of delinquency. *American Sociological Review*, *22*(6), 664–670.

Tait, A. (2018). Rise of the women haters: Inside the dark world of the British 'incels.' *The Telegraph*. Retrieved from https://www.telegraph.co.uk/men/the-filter/rise-women-haters-inside-dark-world-british-incels/. Accessed on August 18, 2018.

Taub, A. (2016). Control and fear: What mass killings and domestic violence have in common. *New York Times*. Retrieved from https://www.nytimes.com/2016/06/16/world/americas/control-and-fear-what-mass-killings-and-domestic-violence-have-in-common.html. Accessed on June 15, 2016.

Taylor, B. (1998). Religion, violence and radical environmentalism: From earth first! to the Unabomber to the earth liberation front. *Terrorism and Political Violence*, *10*(4), 1–42.

Thompson, J. B. (1990). *Ideology and modern culture: Critical social theory in the era of mass communication*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Thorndike, E. L. (1920). A constant error in psychological ratings. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, *4*, 25–29.

Thornton, S. (1995). *Club cultures: Music, media and subcultural capital*. Cambridge: Polity.

Tomkinson, S., Harper, T., & Attwell, K. (2020). Confronting Incel: Exploring possible policy responses to misogynistic violent extremism. *Australian Journal of Political Science*, *55*(2), 152–169.

Tranchese, A., & Sugiura, L. (2021). I don't hate all women, just those stuck-up bitches: How incels and mainstream pornography speak the same extreme language of misogyny. *Violence Against Women*, 107780122199645. https://doi.org/10.1177/1077801221996453

Tropp, L. (2006). BFaking a sonogram^: Representations of motherhood on sex and the city. *The Journal of Popular Culture*, *39*, 861–877.

van der Veer, R. (2020). *Analysing personal accounts of perpetrators of incel violence: What do they want and who do they target?* The Hague: International Centre for Counter-Terrorism.

Van Valkenburgh, S. P. (2018). Digesting the red pill: Masculinity and neoliberalism in the manosphere. *Men and Masculinities*. https://doi.org/10.1177/1097184X18816118

Vera-Gray, F. (2018). *The right amount of panic: How women trade freedom for safety*. Bristol: Policy Press.

Verlinden, S., Hersen, M., & Thomas, J. (2000). Risk factors in school shootings. *Clinical Psychology Review*, *20*(1), 3–56.

Vito, C., Admire, A., & Hughes, E. (2018). Masculinity, aggrieved entitlement, and violence: Considering the Isla Vista mass shooting. *Norma*, *13*(2), 86–102.

Wajcman, J. (2010). Feminist theories of technology. *Cambridge Journal of Economics*, *34*(1), 143–152.

Waling, A. (2019). Problematising 'toxic'and 'healthy'masculinity for addressing gender inequalities. *Australian Feminist Studies*, *34*(101), 362–375.

Wason, P. C. (1968). Reasoning about a rule. *Quarterly Journal of Experimental Psychology*, *20*(3), 273–281.

Weinberg, L., Pedahzur, A., & Hirsch-Hoefler, S. (2004). The challenges of conceptualizing terrorism. *Terrorism and Policical Violence*, 16(4), 777–794.

Wendling, M. (2018). *Alt-right: From 4chan to the White House*. London: Pluto Press.
Whitehead, S. M. (2002). *Men and masculinities: Key themes and new directions* (p. 156). Cambridge: Polity.
Williamson, K. (2018). Advice for incels. *National Review*. Retrieved from https://www.nationalreview.com/magazine/2018/05/28/incel-advice-start-going-to-church/. Accessed on May 10, 2018.
Winter, A. (2019). Online hate: From the far-right to the 'alt-right'and from the margins to the mainstream. In K. Lumsden & E. Harmer (Eds.), *Online othering* (pp. 39–63). London: Palgrave Macmillan.
Witt, T. (2020). 'If I cannot have it, I will do everything I can to destroy it.' The canonization of Elliot Rodger: 'Incel' masculinities, secular sainthood, and justifications of ideological violence. *Social Identities*, *26*(5), 675–689.
Wolfgang, M. E., Ferracuti, F., & Mannheim, H. (1967). *The subculture of violence: Towards an integrated theory in criminology* (Vol. 16). London: Tavistock Publications.
Young, J. (1971). *The drugtakers: The social meaning of drug use*. London: MacGibbon and Kee.
Young, J. (2011). *The criminological imagination*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
Young, O. (2019, May 15). *What role has social media played in violence perpetrated by incels?* Senior Thesis. Chapman University.
Zillmann, D. (1983). Disparagement humor. In P. E. McGhee & J. H. Goldstein (Eds.), *Handbook of humor research* (pp. 85–107). New York, NY: Springer.
Zimmerman, T. (2017). #Intersectionality: The fourth wave feminist Twitter community. *Atlantis: Critical Studies in Gender, Culture & Social Justice*, *38*(1), 54–70.
Zimmermann, M. (2018). *The relationship between domestic violence and terrorism: A comparison between the United Kingdom and the United States*. Master's thesis, University of North Carolina.
Zimmerman, S., Ryan, L., & Duriesmith, D. (2018). Recognizing the violent extremist ideology of "incels." Women in International Security Policybrief. Retrieved from https://www.wiisglobal.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/Policybrief- Violent-Extremists-Incels.pdf
Žižek, S. (1989). *The sublime object of ideology*. New York, NY: Verso.

This page intentionally left blank

Index

Note: Page numbers followed by "*n*" indicate notes.

Abusive partners, 21
Ackerman v. *Board of Education* in 1974, 18*n*1
Aggrieved entitlement, 12
Alt-right, 97
  ideologies, 75, 77
Anime, 57
Anti-feminist
  ideology, 15
  MRAs, 19
  MRM, 19, 22
Australian Security Intelligence Organisation (ASIO), 88
Autism, 43
Autism spectrum disorder (ASD), 7, 44, 126

Backlash, 23
Bernie Bros, 79
Bitchute, 123
Blackpill, 8–10, 31, 41–42, 46 (*see also* Redpill)
  effects of, 64–65
Bluepill, 9
  analogy, 27
Bluepillers, 30
Body positivity movement, 52
Bully Society, *The*, 88

Chads, 51, 60, 62
Chapo Trap House podcast, 79
Club Cultures (Thornton), 70
Cock-carousel, 41
Content analysis of 'Redpill'-related documents, 26
Copycat crime, 89
Counterterrorism responses, 92–94
Craigslist Ripper, 64*n*8
Crash Override site, 29
Criminological theory, 71
Critical discourse analysis (CDA), 107
Cult, 59
Cultural counterreaction, 23
Cyberspace, 27

Dark web, 26
Depression, 126
'Depression Quest' game, 29*n*9
Deviance amplification, 73
Digital Criminology, 6
Digital drift, 72
Digital technologies, 3, 6
Dogpill, 80
Domestic terrorism threat, 3
Domestic violence, 90–91
Doxing, 29*n*9

E-bile, 80
Echo chamber, 77
8chan, 28, 48, 60, 123
80/20 rule of dating, 8
Elliot Rodger (ER), 119
Emotional expression, 18
  of men, 17
Emotions, 17
Everyday misogyny, 98–109
#EverydaySexism Project, 98
Everytown for Gun Safety (EGS), 90
Extremism, 73
Extremist and deviant others, 73–75
Extremists, 69

Facebook, 24, 77, 123
Family law legislation, 19
Father's Rights Activists (FRAs), 23
Fathers for Justice, 15, 24
Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), 90
Female anime, 57
Female hypergamy, 50
Femcels, 6–7
Femicide Census, 21
Feminine Mystique, *The* (Friedan), 18
Feminism, 19–20
Feminists, 12, 55 (*see also* Anti-feminist)
  second-wave, 17
Femoids, 51
Filter bubble algorithms, 78
Filter Bubbles, 77
Foids, 51
4chan, 3, 10, 25, 28, 48, 60, 86, 123

Gab, 123
'Game, The' on Reddit, 57
Geek masculinity, 80
Gender expectations and entitlement, 121–122
Gender Schema Theory, 56–57
Gender-based violence (GBV), 63
Genetics, 51
Gilgo Beach Killer, 64*n*8
Google, 77

Halo effect, 8
Hegemonic masculinity, 12, 18, 33
Hentai, 57
Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabularies (HMIC), 111
Heterosex, 101
History of Sex, *The*, 56
Human pyramid of misogyny, 99
Humanity, 1
Hypergamy, 8, 121

Ideology, 2–3, 9
  anti-feminist, 15
  of incels, 48–57
  misogynistic, 3
Il Forum Dei Brutti, 31
Il Redpillatore (Facebook page), 31
Incel. co, 37
Incel. net, 10
Incels, 1–2, 4–8, 31–32, 69–70
  aim of research, 10
  attacks and legacies, 81–91
  blackpill, 8–10
  communities, 5–6
  community, 117
  deconstructing, 37–39
  effects of blackpill, 64–65
  forums, 7
  forums and websites, 35
  groomed for hate, 59–64
  language and ideology of, 48–57
  male, 27
  mental health, 65–66
  methodology, 10
  misogyny, 75
  moniker, 5
  motivations for joining incel communities, 45–48
  problems, 103
  rebellion, 37
  right and, 75–77
  self-identifying as, 39–45
  spaces, 11
  spaces and norms, 57–59
  terrorists, 60
  wiki, 4
Incels. co/is, 10
Incels. me forum, 59, 61
Incelsphere, 119–120
Instagram, 123
Institute for Research on Male Supremacism (IRMS), 73–74
Intellectual dark web, 97, 109–110
Intellectual Takeout website, 35
Intimate partner violence (IPV), 63

Just be white theory (JBW theory), 8, 30, 52

Language
  of incels, 48–57
  of sex role theory, 17
Legitimate misogyny, 119
Legitimising misogyny, 97
  everyday misogyny, 98–109
  intellectual dark web, 109–110
  male supremacist personalities, 111–114
  political culture wars, 114
Liberated Man, *The* (Farrell), 18
Logic of Lulz, 79
Lone wolves, 91–92
Loneliness, 60, 126
Long Island serial killer (*LISK*), 64*n*8
Lookism, 8, 51

Madonna/whore dichotomy, 42, 121
Male incels, 27
Male Machine, *The* (Fasteau), 18
Male supremacist personalities, 111–114
Male supremacy, 69
Male violence, 21
Manosphere, 1, 23–27, 123–126
  appeal of, 70–72
  crisis of masculinity, 33–35
  development, 4
  emergence and development of, 15
  feminism, 19–20
  masculinity and misandry, 21–22
  men-only spaces, 27–29
  MRM origins, 16–19
  uniting ideological feature of, 2
  young white western cisgender men, 29–33
'Manosphere: A New Hope For Masculinity', The (Ging), 23
Masculinity, 21–22
  crisis of, 12, 33–35
  geek, 80
  hegemonic, 33
  theories, 26
  toxic, 34
Media reporting, 73
Memes, power of, 77–80
Men Going Their Own Way (MGTOW), 2, 15, 23–24, 57, 64
Men-only spaces, 27–29
Men's Liberation (Nichols), 18
Men's Liberation Movement (MLM), 16–19, 118
Men's Rights Activists (MRAs), 1, 15, 20–21, 75, 97, 121
  anti-feminist, 19
  forums and websites, 35
  online, 23
  strategies, 113
Men's Rights Movement (MRM), 1, 15, 56, 102, 118
  anti-feminist, 19, 22
  historical origins, 2
  online, 26
  origins, 16–19
Mental health, 65–66
#MeToo movement, 98, 108–109
Micro-sexisms, 98–99
Minecraft, 69
Misandry, 21–22, 103
Misogynistic ideology, 3
Misogynistic materials, dearth of, 117
Misogyny, 25
  wider problem of, 120–121
Mixed-methods content analysis approach, 59
Monday Blue (*see Monday FA Monday*)
Monday FA Monday, 57*n*7
Myth of Male Power: Why Men Are the Disposable Sex (Farrell), 20

National Organization for Women (NOW), 18, 20
National Rifle Association (NRA), 85
NEETmaxxing, 62
Neoliberalism, 26–27

Net. weenies, 28
Netnography, 10
Networked misogyny, 25
Neurodiversity, 43
NodeXL, 10
NoFappers, 24
Non-white incels, 76
Normies, 80–81
  fakesteam media, 9

Office of National Statistics (ONS), 21, 66
Ok Cupid study, 51
Online anonymity, 72
Online disinhibition effect, 79
Online Harms White paper, 122
Online MRM, 26
Online Safety Bill, 92, 122
Outrage economy, 114

Pareto's 80/20 rule, 49
Performative bigotry, 111
Pick Up Artists (PUAs), 1, 15, 24, 47, 112
Poe's Law, 79
Political culture wars, 114
President of the United States (POTUS), 97
Proud Boys, 24
Psychologists, 66
Psychotherapists, 66
PUAHate, 93
Public ridicule, 52

QAnon, 25

Radical dualism, 51
Rape culture, 101
Real incel threat, 118–120
Rebellion, 62
Reciprocity, 46–47
Redpill, 9
  analogy, 27
  content analysis of 'Redpill'-related documents, 26
Reddit, 3, 10–11, 28, 41, 48, 60, 93
Redpillati, 31
Redpillers, 9
Register-Her. com, 113
Rejection, 61
Respectable deviance, 12
returnofkings (RoK), 111–112
Rigid femininities, 35
Roasties, 51

Satire, 77–80
Second-wave feminists, 17
Sex redistribution, 47
Sex roles
  language of sex role theory, 17
  liberal acknowledgement, 16
  stereotypical socialisation processes, 17
  symmetry, 16
Sexual hegemony, 49
Sexual market value (SMV), 26, 103
Sexual marketplace (SMP), 17, 20
Sexual racism, 8, 52
Sexual revolution, 52–53
Social justice warriors (SJWs), 111
Social media platform providers, legal redress and responsibility of, 122–123
Society for Cutting Up Men (SCUM), 15, 21
Sokal Hoax, 110
Sokal Squared, 110
Solanas' Society for Cutting Up Men (SCUM), 102
Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC), 75, 112
Stacys, 51
Staircase analogy, 90
Stereotypes, 78
Subterranean values, 70–72
Superior clandestine knowledge, 5

Territorial exclusivity, 49
Terrorism, 89–90

Theory of Hegemonic Masculinity (Connell), 33
Thinkspot, 110
Total hypergamy, 50
Toxic masculinity, 34
Tradcons, 24
Trolling, 28–29
Trolls, 28
Twitter, 10, 55, 107, 123

UK 2018 Crime Survey for England and Wales, 22
University of Western Australia (UWA), 81
Uprising, 62
Usenet, 26, 28

Virtual community, 5

'War on Men', The, 32
Washington Post, 49
Web 2. 0, 2
Why Men Are the Way They Are (Farrell), 20
Women's equality, 33
Women's Liberation Movement (WLM), 15, 19

Young white western cisgender men, 29–33
Youth offending, 72
YouTube, 3, 10, 26